UNIVERSITY OF ALBERTA

IN SEARCH OF A LIVING LITERACY:
LANGUAGE, LITERATURE AND ECOLOGICAL SENSIBILITY

By

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Abstract

The impetus for this study was living with children on the coast of Newfoundland during the culmination of decades of blatant disregard for the marine ecosystem. The ensuing social upheaval underscored the deep interrelatedness of human culture and the living Earth.

This research project is born of a belief that education, in its present form, may be an obstacle to a new understanding of our place in the living world. It proposes to see language as a way to re-vision what it means to dwell in place.

Our society is in need of a highly ecologically literate citizenry. To achieve this we must move beyond the perspective of science that underlies many environmental education programs and recover an interpretive, moral, and human relationship with place.

This study inquires into the pedagogical possibilities for nurturing ecological sensibility in children. The hermeneutic phenomenological methodology and the thematic analysis of children's written response to bioregional poetry revealed phenomenological insights of pedagogical value. As the children formed new ecological sensibilities, the interpretive practice was transformative for the researcher, deepening a sense of radical interconnectedness.

Guided by the theory of ecological holism, this inquiry elaborates an experiential and embodied dimension of reader response theory. An important goal of the study is to understand literary engagement as nested in a larger web of relations that includes the cognitive, the biological, even the spiritual.

Children's writers notebook entries revealed an orientation of *patient regard* for the greater life force. The interpretive process showed how the concept of *givenness* characterizes some children's relationship with the living world. The student writing provided possibilities to see the process of deepening children's *ethical relationship* with the 'other than human' with whom they share their places. This inquiry records the *disruption* in children's lives characterized as a deep felt *homelessness* in response to the instability brought about by environmental degradation.

It is hoped that this study is part of a future direction in curriculum studies that is driven by an understanding of the principles of ecology. It is a view that requires thinking in terms of relationship, connectedness and context.

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"I am part of all that I have met" Alfred Lord Tennyson

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Chapter 1: A Roundabout Return to Elemental Matters

Settling in

After two years of doctoral study in Edmonton, Alberta my return to coastal Newfoundland and Labrador in the late summer of 2004 was an uneasy transition. It took weeks to settle into the rhythms of daily living in a small community after the tumult of a cross Canada move. I set out on long kayak trips and walks on my favourite beaches; I visited with old friends trying to find my stride, to make fit what often felt forced and off balance. There was a tacit awareness, a gnawing uncertainty that implicitly manifested itself as a hollowing in the centre of my body. The feeling was there- a murky quality of unease and emptiness that lingered in the momentary, almost too long silent gaps in catch up conversations with neighbours and friends. This felt sense was not simply internal, subjective or merely private, but intricately present, as if carried on the easterly wind – the wind that bears skeins of cold fog into the bay, to dissipate unnoticed in misty tendrils clinging to branches and boughs.

What was the empty, hollowing out quality of unease that marked my return? Was it simply the inevitable awkwardness of seeing friends I had not seen in almost two years? Was it the jittery tentativeness with which we try to reinsert ourselves into other lives, after prolonged absence from once familiar places – the clumsiness of trying to find just the right place to pitch and glide like so many ungainly ducks sweeping in from the sky? Was the feeling an indefinable, unsettling sense of the old adage, "You can never go home again?" I thought of Eugene Gendlin's words, " a feeling is never there for nothing… a feeling is an interaction in some situation…it is a body sense that is unclear in form but more precise than emotions" (1997, p.15). I wanted to inquire into this murky feeling that Gendlin says, "is vague yet more precise" (1991, p. 56) to understand what it was implying or calling forth.

However, my inquiry into this implicit body sense as it was lived and felt was to be rather short-lived. The opportunities to stay with the feeling when it emerged were few, simply because the felt sense dissipated and disappeared after a few weeks of my arrival. But I believe this too was a part of my *being* in that place at that time, a progression of a far more intricately ordered situation than I was conceptually aware at the time. Of course, my *being-in-the-world* is coextensive with my *being-in-the-place*. The bodily implying, the felt sense, the demanding that I wanted to stay with was a manifestation of my being in that place. My reading and thinking, during the past two years, about ecological sensibility as an attunement, the living responsiveness of the intelligent body for relationship with the world was to come to bear in an immediate and very personal way as I tentatively re-gained my balance, my place, during the waning days of that late summer.

I now believe my initial unease, the fluttering, hollowness at the centre of my body those first few weeks was indeed an indication of re-acquaintance, the trying on, and re-learning forgotten sights, sounds, smells, thoughts, images and actions, not as separated dimensions, but all intertwined and deeply sensed in the moment. Perhaps this sense was an inherent need for relationship and belonging temporarily knocked off stride. The undeniable unease indicated a searching for balance, a finding of place again, and while unsettling, the unease was implicitly life affirming. It seemed to be telling me in a new way that, indeed, there exists a deeply sensed interdependency and kinship with a larger living field.

In a few weeks things settled, not in the sense of the word *settle* meaning things were now ordered, established or fixed, but in a more fluid way; the felt sense, the gnawing, jitteriness I experienced on my arrival not so much disappeared as came to rest, somewhere deeper. The English word *settle* can be traced to the Old English *setlan – to put in position of repose*. Repose is a word related to the Late Latin *repausare* meaning to pause, to rest. (Ayto, 2001, p. 441) What had been stirred, aroused on my return to this place had now found equilibrium of sorts, had come to rest and I could begin to live again - to re-settle, to re-inhabit this place.

Living-in-place

This place, my place, is where I would begin the data collection for this study. I was here again, *here* being a rocky peninsula jutting out into the North Atlantic swept by the Labrador Current. It is a place of rugged cobble beaches with black tumbles of seaweed knotted with fragments of old lobster traps, abandoned nets, rope and buoys, shells and pieces of old dories. Driftwood lays bleached and bony white heaved above the wrack line by great storms and tides. Onshore gusts and salt spray prune the forests; the wind sculpts coastal trees nipping exposed needles and buds. Further inland the low hills are predominately boreal in nature, however the peninsula marks the northern limit of many hardwood trees like yellow birch and red maple. Logging cut-overs dot the hills around the bays, leaving a patchy quality to the stands of black spruce and balsam fir that surround the towns and villages.

Without exception people on the peninsula settled in sheltered coves, their houses built close to the ocean, windows, like eyes, oriented toward the sea. For the most part the homes cluster the shoreline, however in more recent years, new houses are built away from the beaches or "in on the back." The coastal landscape has a low, horizontal inflectional, a sense of propinquity, of being close to the sea. During my research I was struck by the numerous references in my students' writing to 'the water,' the term used by so many of them, instead of 'ocean' or 'sea.' The word 'water' seems to elicit a proximity, a primordial, elemental character. Roads wind around the communities following the shoreline, blasted through rock-cuts during the modernization push of the 1960s, but narrow lanes and footpaths still persist. At least one community retains the boardwalks of the past. School children, for the most part, are bussed out of their communities to school each morning, the yellow busses snaking their way up over hills that quickly plunge to sea level. But this commute is a recent development with most communities having had their own primary and elementary schools until recent rounds of government centralization over the past decade.

These are children whose surnames *place* them, who 'belong' to a particular community. Their ancestors emigrated into this part of the island from further east, from the Avalon peninsula, from smaller re-settled islands and coves now abandoned and largely forgotten; some can trace their lineage to the French who fished this coast for over five hundred of years before losing that right in 1904. Still other children are descended from *les Guardiens*, the English settlers hired by the French to protect their properties and holdings while they over-wintered in St. Malo or Brittany. But most families find their reason for living here tied directly to the Earth through mining, to the forests through logging, and to the sea through fishing. In an initial interview with the students participating in this research project each one, with the exception of the daughter of a clergyman, was able to clearly indicate how their families depend upon the land and sea and how they have done so for generations. However, in the early days of the project, I noticed an undeniable reticence in many students to elaborate on the extent of this dependence. But as we talked and the students became more aware that the study allowed for a safe space to explore this relationship, they provided intimate details of their own and their families' involvement with the land and the sea. They spoke of berry picking, and wood gathering, of garden plots, and cabins, of favourite beaches and punts, and 'cooks' in sheltered coves. The students' initial discomfort and reticence to discuss the relationship is something to which I will return.

However, it is important at the beginning of this research project to situate the study and explore what I bring to this project – what led me to take up this inquiry. The person I am today has emerged out of a complex array of life experiences. This "self" was startlingly set down in an ongoing story of family, place and culture. What has brought me to this juncture? What do I bring to this research? How has this project come to me?

Under the spell of spines

I have always been aware of a sense of self that was anomalous. At times, I have been acutely aware of my incongruous interests, but most often this incongruity was latent, manifesting itself as a tremulous tension subtly tugging the sinews of my being.I loved libraries and books. As a child I would hide in the towering stacks, lulled by the quiet soughing to and fro of the matronly librarians. I was secure, protected between the ramparts.

Under the spell of spines is the way I like to think of it now. Clumsy fingers thumping along the vertical rows of neatly ordered books. A title, an illustration catches the eye and the book goes to the floor. Cowboys, dragons, knights and animals - always animals. A fascination with what Tennyson said was "red in tooth and claw." Later, around age ten or twelve, it was science, or more aptly, natural history, archaeology and paleontology that became my passion. The words, the illustrations, the drawings drew me in, and at the same time drew me out - outside, out-of-doors.

My mother tells of her frustration in taking her toddler for walks. Every twig, stone and leaf must be handled, examined and collected. Crouching motionless by a mud puddle the child stirred tawny cumulus clouds of silt in endless wonder; her patience would sag. Later I collected insects and spiders in white plastic ice cream containers. Caterpillars, sow bugs, daddy long legs, crane flies and ants – always ants- two varieties- red and black. Many summer afternoons were spent staring into the writhing mass as an emperor surveys his Coliseum. The small wood behind our house was my world. I knew the spiders and supplied them with hapless crane flies. I marveled at the spiders' speed, agility and the beauty of their silken and deadly designs.

Later, I was permitted to venture to the ocean's edge spending countless hours on the community wharf steeped in the smell of brine and tar staring into the depths until the reflected sun hurt my head. In the tide pools, seas in miniature, sponges encrust the rocks, each hungrily drawing in through its myriad mouths the nutrient-laden water. Starfish, sea anemones and prickly urchins were common. In these pools I crouched and spent the day until the chill of the North Atlantic anesthetized my feet and lower legs. But I did not notice, for once again, I am a child under the spell of spines of a different order.

However, the science of my childhood, of collecting and observing, of imagination and wonder was replaced by another kind of science - the science of the academy. It was a science of abstraction and generalization far removed from my experience. I lost interest and drifted away. I pursued my love of literature into the English classroom and thought the spiders and tide pools were relegated to the stuff of childhood. Childhood wonder banished to the attic of my life. Not so, as my bookshelves attest. They are lined with travel writing, back issues of leather bound *National Geographic* and a wide assortment of adventure and nature writing – John Muir, Sigurd Olson, Annie Dillard, Barry Lopez, Loren Eiseley. I understand that, tugged in separate directions, I chose literature and have come to a deeper sense of what Thoreau meant when he wrote, "Every poet has trembled on the verge of science."

Now I hover nervously over a stumbling two-year-old, as every stone, stick and bit of downy fluff from a robin's breast becomes the subject of deep fascination. "A dead worm daddy, a dead worm daddy!" and everything stops. My daughter crouches and points to the sun dried remains stuck to the curb. I had stopped seeing these minutiae a long time ago. But the children in my life re-awaken my vision, re-open, re-attune my ears.

I am no scientist. I am exploring my neighborhood with an infant, who has just learned to hold his head up. I lay him in the stroller. He fusses. I reach toward him and he extends his tiny hands. Pulling him up he hooks an elbow in the stroller's restraining bar and stays there through sheer effort, gazing about in wonder. It is as if a voice is calling; he struggles to heed the call, the call of his place. But something diverts us from our original intent to explore the neighborhood and view the landscape to discover, if not why, at least where, as Annie Dillard says, we have been "startlingly set down."

Being set down

I was "set down" in a town just coming into its own. A burgeoning centre ready to turn its back on the old ways and take its place as a growing, prosperous and confident urban, industrialized city. Joseph Smallwood, the first premier, had recently told a generation of Newfoundlanders to burn their boats, to turn their backs on the life of subsistence and embrace the 20th century. He emptied hundreds of small outports through forced re-settlement and young men, like my father, made their way to "growth centers" in search of work and the better life they had been promised. As for the resettled communities, a few like Daniel's Cove and Ireland's Eye can be found on a map today, but rarely do roads or ferries lead to them. About three hundred communities exist now only in memories. Alder bushes and trees have overgrown paths; wharves, stages, houses and churches have disappeared with scarcely a trace. But powerful emotions remain. And it is one such place that figured so prominently in my life.

My father who has a grade 11 education was pressed into labour as a "school teacher" by his uncle, the austere and all - powerful Father Jeremiah Howard, whose job it was to staff the schools in his parish. After one year my father escaped his fate, went to work with the Royal Bank in the village of Trinity, and was later transferred to the city. He didn't take to the suburbs however, he chafed and tugged at his life in the neat rows of houses, the paved sidewalks, and attached garages. It was like clothing that never quite fit. Years later I would be reminded of my father when I read Alden Nowlan's poem *Warren Pryor*.

> And he said nothing. Hard and serious
> like a young bear inside his teller's cage
> his axe-hewn hands upon the paper bills
> aching with empty strength and throttled rage.

With every opportunity my father would whisk us away to the outports; I walked with him the overgrown paths in his little community, watched him absently wander the hills and sit for hours on the foundation stones of his house long since torn down. He became quiet in a reverential sadness and he gazed out over the ocean. An ocean that provided a livelihood and exacted its toll in years of brutal physical toil. Crews of four or five, brothers, fathers, sons, uncles would dip hundreds of pounds of cod from the traps or jig them one at a time from deep water shoals; then splitting and salting them standing for hours with cutting knives, their woolen gloves soaked with blood and saltwater. My father told me these stories, and in a sense, through the telling and the years, he was relinquishing the claim this place had on him. Little did he, or I, realize this place was making its claim on me. Newfoundland poet Al Pittman captures beautifully in his poem *St. Leonard's Revisited* the sweet melancholy of those summer visits I shared with my father.

> We came ashore
> Where wildflower hills
> Tilted to the tide…
> Tripping over the cremated
> Foundations
> Of long-ago homes…
> And came again to the cove

As they did after rosary
In the green and salty days…

While we clambered the cliffs, and skipped rocks on the beach there was a haunting spectre of longing, of unrequited be-longing, lurking in my father's eyes. We all knew it, felt it. He would corner us and regale us for hours with stories about "home", and teary warnings to, "Never forget where you're from," and "Thank God everyday you'll never have it as hard as I did."

I was drawn to the ocean, to the beaches and tidepools, to the people. My brother, a published poet, in later years would write in a poem titled "Landscape;"

My father told me
How he spent his boy-days
Bright blue Junes and white Decembers
No greys….

Now, like my father, I have my own "bright blue Junes and white Decembers." I remember Flower's Island, a lighthouse, and the lighthouse keeper- an old friend of my father's, he had a son about my age; we would take a small open boat to the island and visit for the day. On the island, my brother and I looked for robin's nests sheltered from the wind and spray in the gnarled tuckamore, the Newfoundland word for the centuries old white spruce that is tortured and twisted to form an impenetrable canopy just a few feet over our heads. The thin peat at our feet was veined with a network of hardened roots. The shadows were deep and silent; the wind swept over us, but was unable to find a way in. This was where the fairies, those malevolent entities of which my father spoke, carried out their mischief. My brother and I stuck together; there was no sense in taking chances.

“We choose where we live” - Annie Dillard

We don’t like to think of our lives as predictable, as being mapped out, but the connections to people and place and how they shape the people we have become are most often undeniable. Much to the surprise of friends and some family, I chose to take a teaching position in a small coastal community. I remember having to justify that decision to raised eyebrows and skeptical, incredulous stares. And yet the choice, the decision, did not seem a conscious, planned or deliberate one. It is not to this type of choice that Annie Dillard refers in her observation, “We choose where we live.” Our lives bring us to many places, some we can call home, others we simply cannot. Most often, the choosing feels like it is has been done for us. But, ultimately, on some level, we *choose* to stay, to live in a place, for whatever reason. The reasons are as varied as our lives.

I felt comfortable. The place in which my wife and I were going to raise a family was a good fit. I bought a home overlooking the ocean. My backyard led into endless stands of spruce and fir forest. The teaching staff was close knit; the children warm and friendly. The years spent there have not been without their challenges. Coming from homes without a tradition of the literacy and skills valued by mainstream economy and culture, many children had special needs and required consistent, thoughtful care and attention. The collapse of the cod fishery in the early nineties had a profound effect on families and children dispersing them throughout Canada, undermining self-reliant communities with strong traditions of valuing intergenerational knowledge and systems of mutual support.

As a teacher, I lived with children in a region once home to the greatest biomass on the planet. The incredible diversity and numbers of fish species that swam the plankton-rich waters of the North Atlantic stood not only as testament to the miracle of the life generating power of the Earth, but also to the unknowable depths of human greed and the capacity to destroy and lay waste to that same miraculous fecundity. Working through the lens of critical pedagogy I attempted to address my concerns by devoting several weeks of my language arts program to exploring the social, political and environmental constructs responsible for the collapse of the ocean ecosystem. The exploration was primarily expository; letter writing, critical media analysis, debates and research essays. In retrospect, it was an objectivist orientation to support the objectivist approach of the sciences. Environmental education in my school, as in most others, was a subset of the science curriculum. As the ocean was plundered and decimated, the children dutifully categorized the natural resources and diagrammed the food cycle. Meanwhile, their communities died a slow, inexorable death. A way of life that had sustained these communities for almost two centuries was no longer available to its children. Hope and promise were on the wane. Many children grappled with the prospect of leaving a place that was their home.

It was my students' personal, expressive writing that is largely responsible for this research project. The writing spoke to me of children struggling with their sense of place in a rapidly changing reality and it led me to look elsewhere for insight and understanding, to language and literature – to poetry and fiction. I felt that imagination, creativity, the power of language that had sustained me may provide another way of knowing more deeply how to dwell in place. I want it to allow children to experience their place, to experience the complex and subtle interrelationships between humans and the living landscape that surrounds them. I want to explore how children experience and respond to literature, particularly poetry, that reflects interactions and interrelationships between the human, and as David Abram says, “the more than human.” It was my students’ writing that initiated my search to find writers who give voice to the essential fullness of life and landscape.

And so, in reflection, these life stories, these moments become little allegories that hold my sense of self and point toward my project - both my life project and my research project. I look for ways to take up the written word, to do as Abram (1996) counsels, to nurture children in the craft of freeing their words to respond to the language of the Earth itself. Words, stories and poems that slip off the printed page to inhabit the tide pools, the beaches, the meadows and whispering bushes of our lives. In letting language take root, in planting words like seeds, in taking up the rhythm and cadence of our place we may learn not “why,” but at least, “where” we have been “startlingly set down.”

A leaning into the light

So this was the place to which I was returning and re-establishing a connection to the ebb and flow of a living earth. I was to take my place in this coastal bioregion, through a wealth of images, sensations and feelings produced by an intermingling of maritime community, of culture and living landscape. In the waning weeks of that summer, as I prepared to return to the classroom and to the lives of children, I was reminded of the immediacy and rawness of life here. Tragic events in August set the tone for my fledgling project and determined how it was to unfold during that fast approaching autumn.

News swept through the villages on a fine mid August afternoon of a drowning. A boy I had taught just prior to my departure for doctoral studies had been swimming in a small pond with his brother and cousin just a short walk from their community. Men from the village using a small boat retrieved his body; gingerly snagging his bathing suit with hand lines, they brought him to the surface - an all too familiar image in the human history of coastal Newfoundland. The boy would have been in my classroom in a few short weeks and, most likely, would have been eager to participate in this project. Now I was attending his funeral. I remembered him as a quiet, sensitive boy who enjoyed reading and drawing, filling his writing portfolio with wonderful stories, poems and sketches. He was communally remembered for these qualities on that sad day.

I sat with an overflow crowd in the tiny parish hall to watch and listen to the funeral on television, as the church next door was full. Outside, the branches of small aspen brushed the window; a blue sky and freshening breeze brought little relief to those inside fanning themselves with thin Mass booklets. As I waited for the many mourners to be seated, I turned the booklet in my hands. On the last page was a photograph of the boy's smiling face; the picture had been cropped out of a larger shot - on a beach, perhaps, for grey cliff was visible in the background. It was written below, in a wistfully short paragraph, that he loved writing, poetry, and life in his small community. The winter woods, the ponds, the beaches, and the coves intersected with all aspects of his young life, of who he was. Yet, it was particularly poignant and painful to think that this relationship somehow figured in his death. In the intervening days between his death and funeral I listened for the words of anger, of resolve to never allow children to swim at that pond, to fence off the area, that it was unsupervised and dangerous (thoughts that flooded my mind during those days), but I didn't hear them. Children have always swum there, just as they play on the wharves and row their punts around the coves. There was no anger. But I was shaken. In a matter of days I would be asking these same young people I saw sitting around me in that little church hall to share with me through reading, writing and reflection their relationship with their larger living landscapes, to activate and nurture an attunement for the natural places in which they dwell. I was troubled, for mine was to be a life-affirming project and here I was facing, what I perceived to be, a cruel and meaningless death.

If there is a stage where we become mature it must be when we grasp the irony in the unfolding of life and accept responsibility for living in the midst of such paradox. We live nested in contradiction because there is no eliminating it. There are simply no answers to some of the great pressing questions; the most pressing being, "Why? For what purpose?" We continue to live these questions out; making our lives a worthy expression of, what Barry Lopez calls "a leaning into the light."

As I looked into their deeply saddened faces I felt the arrogance of thinking of the children's lives as my 'project.' To believe we can bring ourselves before the world to willfully 'take it in,' or to consider bringing others before the world to have them 'taken in' seemed to be a naïveté bordering on sentimentality. I was humbled, and the false assurance of a seeker of *knowledge*, a research grant holder, became an emptiness, an openness, and in a sense, a kind of *poverty*. The word *poverty* comes to me through its original compound meaning from the Latin *paucaus* – little or few, and *parare* – to prepare. This emptiness, or poverty, I felt was a kind of preparation- not of a scholarly or methodological variety- but a making ready for something, a leading up to, a yielding. Also inherent in the word *poverty* is the sense of the service provided by the one who prepares, the tending in making ready. I knew that whatever else might be achieved with these children it must be imbued with the pedagogical, the sensitive and the thoughtful. It will point to the space, to the creation and the tending of a clearing across which the world may approach. Sitting there in the tiny parish hall perched on the rocks, it was my hope that this inquiry would provide a space, a clearing for the words/voices of children. Their memories, stories, poems, life experiences and spoken words gleaned from the buffeting swirl of life inside and outside classroom walls would find their place here. Finger sculpted words rendered in the twirl of yellow pencils, deposited here in the furrowed wrack lines by the push of the wind. Words gathered in the roaming over the landwash, living in the eco-tone, on the margin, the border, the boundary – gathered like fragile limpet shells and polished glass.

Chapter 2: Educational Significance of the Study

Two classrooms

The grade eight science class is busy – the unit, *Interactions and Ecosystems.* Small groups of three or four huddle around desktops turned to face each other. Students kneel or sit on their heels before poster board and a scattering of coloured markers, scissors and old magazines. The florescent lights are made brighter in the gathering autumn gloom; the morning hour has an afternoon feel. Outside, the year is being swept away in a serious November light. "Okay, grade eights," the teacher reminds, "we're only interested in those natural resources on which we depend right here in our region." A few students look up.

"Remember what we talked about," the teacher continues, "we rely on human resources and natural resources." She makes her way carefully, avoiding the rolling markers and open textbooks. "Pay attention to detail and be specific," she instructs, "include pictures to illustrate the different resources on which humans rely."

A northerly wind scours the surface of the bay visible from the classroom window pushing long manes of white caps toward a black rocked beach skirted by an apron of snow. The world is monochrome, grayscale. A disembodied voice rises from behind a knot of desks, "Do we include cod when we list fish as a resource?" The teacher moves forward. Some say yes, others no; work stops, markers poise.

There is a brief discussion - the words *mismanaged*, *endangered* and *extinct* intersperse the conversation. "Too many boats, too few fish," mimes a young voice in a surety gleaned from countless adult conversations around a kitchen table. Attentive to the moment, the teacher asks about technology's part in the disappearance of fish. "Factory trawlers, foreigners, fish finders"… the volume increases… One boy blames seals; a girl jumps to their defense.

"Okay, okay," the teacher timely interjects and re-focuses the group. "Include the fishery but leave out cod, just chart the other species."

"Crab and shrimp?"

"That's right. Now let's get back to work." She moves off toward another group of students.

A sudden sharp gust lifts sand grains and small rocks from the parking lot sending them in a tinkling spray against the classroom window. A young girl lifts her eyes to see a brooding low sky, and churlish gray sea – a sea that gives little anymore. Boats toss on their moorings or lay slumped on their sides on the beach, propped carelessly in disuse. Men mill around in small groups or bend into the wind on their way to the corner store. "Only fifteen minutes people," the teacher's voice cuts in. The girl continues to colour the letters for her chart, *Our Natural Resources*. The marker squeaks with each firm stroke as cold rain skids across the panes unnoticed.

Down the corridor a teacher reads aloud. The grade 9 class is exploring a selection of poems by the writers of the region who have, as the teacher is fond of saying, "given voice to the essential fullness of life and landscape." Rain runs in tiny rivulets and pools on the blackened sills. Heads turn toward the windows when the gusts slant forcefully, audibly washing clean an autumn's grime. The teacher reads a final stanza, his voice rhythmically invoking the pull of place as written by John S. Mitchell:

boats upside down
on red wharf
cliffs surround and close
centuries of eyes
in each eye
whispers and whispers
in me.

His voice trails off quietly in diminuendo holding the last syllable. A hand goes up but not before a boy blurts out, "It's like he's being watched or something, it's a creepy feeling, isn't it?"

"Yes?" the teacher acknowledges a boy who has raised his hand. "I think that the speaker feels there is a lot history in that place- there are people, but it seems to be a much longer history, centuries - or… it's like geological time."

Katie, a girl near the window adds, "And it seems to be speaking to him, a feeling or, like, a spirit of the place whispering… it's hard to explain." Outside now, the bay and surrounding hills have become obscured- a thin skein of fog envelops all imperceptibly, as roads and houses fade; the light is forced, squeezed and burnishes roof lines and fence posts

The teacher holds comment and chooses another poem *Watching My Grandmother Pick a Late Flower* by New Brunswick poet Allan Cooper. Once again his voice quickly adopts the cadence and flow of word and line as he begins to read. The poem tells of a memory, a longing for another place and time;

She wanted to pick the last fading iris
in a field
across the road,
she spoke of old homesteads,
now gone…

> She walked out into the field.
> She carried the past with her.
> her presence stirred
> the grass…

The last word seems to hang in the air. He closes the book and walks toward the window. “What I would like you to do is to write about a time when you had a similar experience as these poets.” “Where were you?” “What was it like?” “What does it remind you of?” “Write quietly in your handbooks for the next fifteen minutes.” The students are familiar with the process; there is some rustling in desks, but most are busy already.

The girl by the window, Katie, twirls her yellow pencil, the words still reverberating, “field,” “homestead,” “presence,” “stirred”… a felt-sense, a memory, an image arises and she begins to write:

> I remember seeing my grandfather, sitting and rocking, his hands with their big blunt fingers resting in his lap like two old dogs. I remember thinking how he loved the water, his boat and how his hands tell the story of his life on the sea their creases, scars, deep lines are story lines. His hands were formed by hard work, always soaked by cold salt water (but not preserved). Big and quick they knit twine, braid rope, haul nets filled with fish, countless cuts from fileting (sic) knives. Strong and gentle at the same time- hands to fix a doll and to build a boat. Wethered (sic), eroded like the cliffs, old like the drift wood… tired now, trembling and turning the crinkled thin paper of his worn black Bible… I can’t help but think my grandfather belongs to the sea and the sea to him.

The bell rings to end the period. Outside a herring gull swoops on an empty potato chip bag skittering across the parking lot.

The limits of science

Like thousands of students in Canada the children in the science classroom above, busy categorizing and charting, are learning about the natural environment and appropriate human-environment relationships as a subset of the science curriculum. In Atlantic Canada most recently developed curriculum documents introduce environmental science as a course of study in high school, while throughout all grades environmental education emphasizes technology, trade and resources. Most often, it is a biological approach with a strong focus on efficient use and wise management of those resources. The underlying belief of curriculum developers is that by understanding our reliance on the natural environment, researching endangered species, calculating ecological footprints and memorizing the "Rs" in the recycling process our children will become ecologically literate and sensitive citizens. The firm hope is that this approach will inculcate in children a knowledge that results in a sensitive, respectful, and restrained use of nature.

Without a doubt, science has its place in environmental education. The abstraction, the impersonal, the objectifying stance of science can help us know *some things* with a degree of certainty. It has produced an invaluable body of knowledge about intricate ecological systems, the value of species and the complexity of species diversity. Scientific study provides information on which we base decisions that will directly affect the health and well being of this planet and in turn each of its inhabitants. The children in the grade 8 classroom are engaged in important work. They will come to know and value the bounty of their region and understand their dependence on it. However, the knowledge gained in this classroom begs the questions, "In what way do our children *know* the living Earth and what *value* do they give it?" Wendell Berry (2000) says, "We know enough of our history by now to be aware that people *exploit* what they have merely concluded to be of value, but they *defend* what they love" (p. 39). Does the technical, resourcist bias of the sciences with its dispassionate, objectifying language make it incapable of bearing the burden that we place upon it?

Can we nurture ecological sensitivity by dissecting owl pellets or by diagramming the water cycle? Science reduces; reductionism is invaluable to scientists; it is what they do. It is indispensable to all of us. There are times we must know the composition of things, how they hang together, what laws and principles govern their behaviour. But most often what happens in dissecting the owl pellet is that the owl disappears, the mouse that was her meal disappears and in the categorizing of our ocean "resources" the cod disappears. Literally, in the latter case. In the quest for empirical certainty, in reducing an entity, a species to its constituent parts, it disappears in abstraction. The creature, the being is lost – the individual and the unique is lost. In the coldly determined intelligence of the categories, the cod are lost; the trees are lost to "forestry," the skeins of fog and misty droplets to the "water cycle." In a sense, life is lost. Science cannot show the *life* in the life cycle of the owl. Its life is a wholeness inherent in its totality of experience in a place.

This *life* is a particularity, a relationality of embeddedness in place that is unavailable to empiricism and objectivism. There is life, a sentience that engenders care and affection. It calls for a kind of sensitivity, the pathic, the felt - a "living way of knowing" (Jardine, 1998, p.95), that is perhaps not a "knowing" at all. At least not in the sense of *knowing* as we usually consider it. Things cannot survive as abstractions, as categories on chart paper and poster board, but only as unique, individual creatures, entities living in place. It was these concerns that motivated Marilyn Doerr (2004) to adapt William's Pinar's *currere* for implementation in a high school science based Ecology course. Doerr developed a practice she called Environmental Autobiography to counterbalance the mechanistic, objectification of the scientific approach as a means to let students "begin to emotionally connect" with the environment. Doerr explains what happened in her Ecology class.

> During the times we were exploring the basic scientific principles of ecology, we were also exploring the interior lives of people interested in ecology – themselves…I needed to find something that would move my students from "I know" to "I care." (2004, pp. 30, 31)

The experience of living with children on the coast of Newfoundland during the momentous culmination of decades of blatant disregard for the marine ecosystem was in many ways life altering. The ensuing social upheaval underscored the connection, the deep interrelatedness of the human cultural world and the biotic realm that is the reality of human existence. The shameful ways we have compromised the marine ecosystem and the reductionistic commodification leading to the extirpation of the myriad living beings of the sea resulted in a profound systemic effect on children, families and communities. What happened and continues to happen makes real Thomas Berry's observation;

> We cannot live simply with ourselves. Our inner world is a response to the outer world. Without the wonder and majesty and beauty of the outer world we have no developed inner world. As all those living beings around us perish, then we perish within. In a sense we lose our souls. We lose our imagination, our emotional range, we even lose our intellectual development. We cannot survive in our human order without the entire range of natural phenomena that surround us. (in O'Sullivan, 1997, p. i)

Daily we are made aware, no matter where we live, that our Earth is sending us distress signals. The destruction of the Earth and the tearing of the very fabric of life in the name of hyper-consumption (Borgmann, 1997) and the global market economy (McMurtry, 2002) is not susceptible to easy fixes and solutions. Consumerism fueled by pervasive and sophisticated media manipulation pressures parents to work more, longer and farther afield, depriving children of a stable home and relegating them to the care of strangers in often crowded day care. There is a marked rise in eating disorders, and obesity as children spend hours inside in the company of television, video and computer. This lack of connection to people, community and place is having a profound effect on children. Recent research has drawn a link between children diagnosed with ADHD and the lack of opportunities of these children to actively engage in "outdoor activities in more natural settings" and "green landscapes." (Louv, 2005, p. 70) In the United States, "an estimated five million young people regularly take at least one psychiatric drug" (Norberg-Hodge, 2003, p. 11). This cultural preoccupation with materialism and consumption has led to a crisis of meaning (Fisher, 2002) in our society and a "felt sense of homelessness" (O'Sullivan, 1997, p. 235) that must become "the central concern of education in the future" (Berry, 1997, p. xii). We require an educational vision that honours our need for connection to people and place.

In his book *Transformative Learning: Educational Vision for the 21st Century* (1999), Canadian scholar Edmund O'Sullivan posits that modernity, with all its wonders and advances has reached the full fruition of its limitations. He writes, "We are in need of an evolutionary transformation that transcends the forces of modernism and includes them at the same time" (1999, p. 1). O'Sullivan believes a new consciousness is called for – "a planetary consciousness" resulting from an educational framework that must be "visionary and transformative and must clearly go beyond the conventional educational outlooks that we have cultivated for the past several centuries" (1999, p. 3). He argues for what he calls a comprehensive and integrated perspective or what was previously known as a "cosmology," one that would engender "an ecologically sustainable vision in the broadest terms; what can be termed a planetary vision" (1999, p. 4). Huey Li Li (2003) argues that what is called for is an integration of bioregion based education and critical global education in the development of a "double consciousness." He believes "the formation of 'double consciousness' is a nexus of interconnected processes that generate and regenerate dialogical human relations. Likewise, the integration of bioregionalism and global education is a commitment to facilitating an ongoing cultural dialogue about "co-existence, reconciliation and hybridization." (Li Li, 2003, pp. 67 –72)

O'Sullivan, mindful of the postmodern critique and the demise of the master narrative, anticipates the deconstructionists and presents not a master narrative of any one culture, but a story of the universe itself, the ultimate “ground” in any theory - the ground beneath our feet and develops a “powerful visionary context embedding the human community within the Earth community and ultimately within the universe…” (1997, p. 30). The writer Charlene Spretnak (1999) also recognizes the fundamental nature of this kind of thinking in who we are as human beings and our place, our ancestral affinity, as beings born of an animate Earth. She recalls a presentation she attended given by two of the most recognized writers on the natural world – Barry Lopez and Richard Nelson. Spretnak writes, “a love of language and nature and a humility before both” (1999, p. 129) permeated their comments, but one observation in particular stayed with her. Lopez and Nelson spoke about wild animals as being so acutely aware of minute events in their considerable range of attention that their consciousness extends far beyond their fur into the sensate forest. Lopez observed that a bear taken out of its habitat and put in a zoo, or shopping mall, is still a form of mammalian life, but it is not a bear. Spretnak writes in response to this observation:

> It’s not a bear.
>
> It’s not human if its felt connection with the unfolding story of the bioregion, the Earth community and the cosmos are atrophied, denied and replaced. It’s not human if it can no longer experience awe and wonder at the beauty and mystery of life, seeing nothing but resources and restraints. It’s not human if it is socialized to be oblivious to the unity of life, so lonely that it is vulnerable to all compensatory snares. (p. 129)

This research project is born of a belief that education in its current form may be the greatest obstacle to O'Sullivan's transformative vision. Preparing children for the information economy, structuring their days with the relentless pursuit of higher standardized test scores and the deadening transmissive teaching this engenders is short-sighted and simply wrong headed. But we must press on in our own ways with what Thomas Berry (1999) calls "The Great Work." The stakes are simply too high not to. Only blind denial can ignore the warning signals we are receiving from the Earth. The human tragedies of poverty, disease, malnutrition and violence occurring in an era when so many live in incredible material wealth can only be ignored by those who choose to do so. The educating of the young must reflect a different consciousness than one that sees our domination and our destruction of the Earth as the inevitable by-products of "progress." We must educate so we see ourselves as part of the web of life, as implicated in the world, not simply isolated, self-maximizing individuals. David G. Smith (1994) warns; "As adults we inevitably suffer the cultural diseases of our time, but then reproduce them in our children to the same degree we have not healed ourselves" (p. ii). This inquiry proposes to see language - poetry, writing and response as means to heal and re-vision our human presence on the Earth. This requires a new understanding of ourselves and our place in the living world, in communities, and in traditions that will sustain us ecologically and spiritually.

Different ways of knowing

The instrumental rationalism and the technocratic, managerialist language that is dominant in education today is pervasive and powerful. The discourse reflects a way we have come to *know* the world – an epistemology. But what happens when epistemology becomes ontology? In other words, what are the implications when the discourse of science-technology-industry claims to reflect the physical reality of the natural world and constructs how humans are to "be" in the world? What happens when the language of science-technology-industry, so prevalent in our classrooms consigning the Earth to mere *concept* and life to mere *resources*, is largely responsible for strongly held cultural beliefs about the way the world "really is" ? Do our children see the living world as a machine? Does the metaphor become identity? Does it lead one to believe that the Earth and all its creatures are mere human artefacts?

A popular CBC radio Saturday morning science program *Quirks and Quarks* hosts scientist after scientist who invariably, somewhere in the interview, reaffirm the belief that life is an amazing machine, a complicated machine, a wondrous machine. E.O Wilson, a Harvard biologist and Pulitzer prize winning author, possibly one of the most influential scientists living, spoke at a conference of the *Association for the Study of Literature and Environment* I attended and said unabashedly, "People are, after all, just extremely complicated machines," and an "organism is a machine." Later in his keynote address he said, "the brain is a machine," "the mind is merely the brain at work," "we will have solved the engineering problem of the human mind completely in the next twenty five years." In his recent book, *Consilience: The Unity of Knowledge*, Wilson states, "Science is neither philosophy nor a belief system. It is … a culture of illuminations hit upon by a fortunate turn of history that yielded the most effective way of learning about the real world ever conceived" (1998, p.49). Here, I believe Wilson *underestimates* the reach and grasp of science for it, indeed, has become both a philosophy and a belief system.

E.F. Schumacher said, " The volume of education… continues to increase, yet so do pollution, exhaustion of resources, and the dangers of ecological catastrophe. If still more education is to save us, it would have to be education of a different kind; an education that takes us into the depth of things" (in Sterling, 2001, p. 21). Our society is in need of a highly ecologically literate citizenry as in no time in the past. To achieve this we must move beyond the scientific into a conversation designed to bring to light our strongly held beliefs and values concerning our relationship with the more-than-human-world.

But in what sense do I use the word "ecological"? In paying close attention to the meaning of the word is to address its significance. The Nelson Canadian Dictionary (1997) indicates that "ecology" can be defined firstly as "the science of relationships between organisms and their environments" and secondly as "the relationships between organisms and their environments." It is interesting to note that the definition itself tends toward "objective" abstraction by placing *the science* as a common term with *the relationships*. This is not an intimate ecological relationship but one marked by the disengaged reductionism of science. When we trace the life of the English word ecology to its roots, we see that is was derived "from the German *Okologie*: Greek *oikos*, house; see *weik*: clan (social unit above the household). Greek *oikos: house, dwelling [ecology, diocese, ecumenical]*" (Nelson Canadian Dictionary, 1997). The original life of the word was tied to relationship, to clan, and family. The term *dwelling* suggests a noun and synonym for *house*; yet it retains the sense of its verb form, *to dwell*: ecology as dwelling, as what it means to dwell in place. Heidegger describes the troublesome separation in the West between becoming and being as the artificial separation between what it is "to build" and "to dwell" (Foltz, 1995). We live in a culture preoccupied with building at the expense of dwelling. Our curriculum privileges the knowledge of building at the expense of the knowledge of dwelling. We must reclaim the word ecology for education to understand that as we build, we must dwell, and the two cohere.

Reclaiming the "sensible"

Where can we look to lead our children into a sense of what it means to truly dwell on and care for the Earth? How do we recover a relationship with place, to allow children to nurture what seems to come to them naturally, an embodied integration into the wonder and awe of their natural places? How might we recover a sense of education that educes and engages, while encouraging spontaneity, insight and reflection as it nurtures our children to be critical *and* compassionate?

What may be called for is a means to go beyond the knowledge of science while at the same time being inclusive of it. This research project explores the possibility to know the animate Earth through an understanding of language that is inherent in a matrix of the *sensible*. As with the word ecology, I use the word *sensible* with consideration and somewhat differently from the way it used in the vernacular today. To be sensible usually connotes "good sense marked by reasonable, intelligent action and behavior" (OED, 2002). The word has languished under this constricted definition, but I do not wish to abandon it by turning away from it. The word can be re-claimed by working to re-open its true history, nuance and depth. I invoke the word *sensible* to recover another meaning with which it was once imbued. Sensible and hence "sensibility" is tied directly to the Latin "sensus," to feel, the power or faculty of feeling; the capacity of sensation and emotion. The word sensibility is distinguished from the cognitive and the intelligible, that which is grasped by the intellect. When we reveal the original meaning of *sensible* we see that it is rich, yet delicate and subtle, in its evocative power. When recovered in this way, sensibility now seems to resonate with the capacity to communicate a kind of readiness to respond, a sensitivity born out of awareness and attunement. It conveys an emotional consciousness, a delicate attention. The word is also tied to a feeling of vulnerability and to the possibility that as a quality or trait, sensibility exposes one to be hurt, or feel offended, by unkindness or displays of uncaring. *The Compact Oxford English Dictionary* (2002) tells us that in the 18th and early 19th centuries to be sensible, or to be possessing of sensibility, was to "have a capacity for refined emotion, readiness to feel compassion for suffering" and to be moved by that which evokes sympathy in *literature and art*. How might a generative, ecological understanding of language and literature nurture a sensibility in children for the life of the places in which they dwell? What is the nature of this sensibility? Is it a feeling? Is it a virtue, or an attitude? How, if at all, may it be taught?

The teacher in the grade 8 class described above introduces his students to the writers of his bioregion- to the poets who have taken up language, the written word in all its potency and who endeavour to write language back into the landscape (Abram, 1996). They are writers who, as the teacher says, "give voice to the essential fullness of life and landscape." These are writers who are attuned to other forms of sentience that surround us in the present. They employ the language of the individual, the unique. The classroom is situated in a larger world, a world of time and tide, the revolving seasons, the wheeling sun and moon on an encircling horizon. What happens when we are led by writers who encourage us to slip out of abstraction and human logic, to awaken another way of knowing our world… a way that may lead us to see our connection with and reliance on the living Earth, to truly understand that a grandfather can "belong to the sea, and the sea to him"? What is called for is a "new story" (Swimme & Berry, 1992; Abram, 1996; Evernden, 1996), another way to think of our world and our place in it.

Chapter 3: Research Methodology: Context and Plan

Rationale

The grade 8 science classroom described above represents a common stance taken toward learning about the world in which we live. In most schools children learn about the world, their immediate environment, the landscape outside their windows in the science classroom, or perhaps in the physical geography classroom that also has a highly technical bias. It is a pursuit firmly entrenched in the language of objectivism, of reductionism and rationality. Science speaks the language of abstraction and abstract categories: "resources," "ecosystem," "species," "management" and "endangered." It is not the place to explore the personal and the passionate. When the students engage each other in discussion, when feelings emerge, opinions are voiced, the teacher steps in quickly to keep the children on task, "Okay, okay, … include the fishery, but leave out cod, just chart the other species." Wendell Berry (2000) would say of this teacher's language that if it is carried too far becomes a language of "false specification and pretentious exactitude, never escaping the cold heartedness of abstraction" (p. 45).

Once again I want to be perfectly clear that this is in no way to denigrate or devalue the activity or the scientific enterprise. Science has provided and continues to provide through the same abstract and reductionistic methodology the conveniences of technology and the advances in medicine that are to be celebrated as great human achievements adding immeasurably to our quality of life. Science allows us to understand conceptually the diversity of life and the importance and complexity of life systems. However, my concern is for children who learn about the more-than-human world almost exclusively through the sciences. Science is powerful; the culture and profession has legitimacy and the confidence of society. There is, contrary to E.O. Wilson's earlier statement, an undeniable *faith* in science – one that precludes, for many secondary teachers and curriculum developers, criticism or critical thought. This faith is evident in our schools where the esteem in which we hold the sciences is reflected in the resources allocated in budgets and time allocated in the student course schedules. We believe in science. Science/technology, with its dispassionate, impersonal, "objective" language can help us know many things, but can it engender a knowledge from which will emerge the affection, caring, and concern needed to value, love, and protect?

This is the way of knowing that I look for in my discipline – the language arts. It is a way of knowing our place, a literacy of the living, more-than-human landscape that comes out of a vital and particularizing language – a language unavailable to objectivism. It is my desire to inquire as to the nature of this knowing. How can defining our human abilities, language and imagination, as products of nature be seen as mediums by which we may grow in our relationships with the living places we inhabit? How can the poetry of the bioregion that says something about human-nonhuman interaction and interrelationship, provide a vital, dynamic space of transaction and mutualism between text and reader (Rosenblatt, 1978)?

Without listing the myriad ways we have compromised our natural inheritance and consequently our own health and well being, the importance of such an exploration in the language arts is self-evident. I want to make clear again that this project in no way stands in opposition to scientific inquiry for we must know our world conceptually and scientifically, but we must also know it imaginatively in a way that engenders affinity and affiliation for the places we inhabit. At this point in our history, as we continue to turn our rational powers to the scientific, the technological, we cannot turn away from the human, the role of mind and emotion, the agency of language. Should we not seek out the combined wisdom of inductive reason and imaginative vision to foster an ecological sensibility, a pathic, felt sense for the places we in-habit that is nurtured through language? If so, this effort will require what I call a "living literacy," that is a recognition of the life of places and creatures in a wholeness taken together in human experience - a wholeness unavailable to the determinism of empiricism.

Dissertation research question

The ideas, experiences and connections related above lead to the posing of the question that guides the research:

What are the pedagogical possibilities for nurturing ecological sensibility in children through a participatory engagement with bioregional reading and writing?

Growing out of, yet firmly rooted in and dependent on the main question are the following sub-questions;

1. What is meant by ecological sensibility and how does it represent a different way of knowing? In what way is ecological sensibility knowable? Can it be taught? If so, how?
2. How can we understand language as a means to foster relationship with the living world?
3. How can experiential reader-response literary theories focused on students'

processes of engagement and involvement with bioregional literature allow for ecological sensibility - a heightened consciousness and an intensified cognitive and emotional experience?

4. What is "bioregional literature" and what is its potential to engage young readers to nurture ecological sensibility?

Trying to understand children's experience of their living landscape through their writing, and through their response to literature, is in a sense the creation of another opening, or clearing across which meaning may approach. It involves a dwelling with these children's words. Unlike the noesis of objectivity, of fixity and analytic reason, this inquiry is not interested in the power of knowledge over the words; the reflection is not interested in converting itself to utility. It is important to understand that the writing and the words of these children are not to be seen as a "problem" or "raw data," for I do not seek the epistemological certitude of reason in my reflections here. It is a questioning that does not seek to subdue as much as to dwell. It is more in keeping with the words of theologian Tim Lilburn (1999) writing about contemplation, " It requires a cognitive humility, a deference to the intellect's will to power… you subdue the need for intellectual clarity and the security this brings…" (p. 35).

The drowning death of a former student, a boy who would most likely have participated eagerly in this research, coincided with my home-coming and made real for me the contingent unpredictability of this type of inquiry. The sad event affirmed the undeniable fact that this project is grounded in experience; it uses the experiential as its touchstone. I sought a methodological approach in which poetry, philosophy and ecology can coexist with crows and icebergs, tide pools and children, with life and possibly death.

It is in the generativity of eclecticism that I described the engagement of young readers with language and in doing so elicited an open receptivity to generate pools of experience, feeling and meaning. This approach made way for and honoured the experience of my students as we, together, nurtured and fostered through poetry a sense of the intimate connection between ecological attunement and language. This project is in essence an undertaking imbued in the pedagogic. The hermeneutic phenomenological approach adhered to in this research reflects this pedagogic concern because "pedagogy requires a phenomenological sensitivity to lived experience (children's realities and lifeworlds)" (van Manen, 1997, p. 2).

This project is part of a larger life project. It is ultimately in-formed by an array of life experiences. Van Manen (1997) believes,

> From a phenomenological point of view to do research is always to question the way we experience the world, to want to know the world we live in as human beings... research is a caring act; we want to know what is most essential to our being. (p. 5)

Describing the experience of teacher and students as we engage with reading and writing that may lead to a greater ecological sensibility requires a methodology rich in language that is able to show the lived quality and significance of the experience and at the same time deepen and enrich it. The inquiry takes place in a classroom, a classroom situated and contextualized within a living landscape subject to the rhythms of seasons and tides, inhabited by children who grow in and out of the life of their bioregion. I gather information through observation, artefacts (Spradley, in Creswell, 1998) and materials creating a portrait that depicts a community, a culture, embedded in an ongoing story of land and sea. The study narrates (from the Latin noscere, "to know") a language arts classroom as a space in which children, teacher, place and landscape collide and coalesce in the messy contingency of everyday experience.

Hermeneutic phenomenological research is the application of logos (language and thoughtfulness) to an experience (an aspect of lived experience, to what shows itself precisely as it shows itself) (van Manen, 1997). This language must mirror the world and at the same time be fed by it. It must be writing that is "sensitive … to the way language speaks when it allows the things themselves to speak" (van Manen, 1997, p. 116). The writing will only succeed when out of the description some-thing is revealed, something is understood, or profoundly heard (Smith, 1999) in the lived experience of that classroom, at that time.

As I explore the pedagogical possibilities to nurture the intimate connection between ecological sensibility, of affinity with natural places, and language, I attempt to balance the narration, the rich description inherent in the phenomenological method and the hermeneutic, interpretative goals of the study. Ultimately, this research may be considered a deictic discourse. The word deictic comes from the Greek *deiknynai*, which means "to show, to point out, to bring to light, to set before one and then also to explain and teach" (Fisher, 2002, p. 45). Deictic discourses are experiential and such writers point away from themselves to what matters; they write as one who bears witness.

Framework of inquiry

The data collection took place over a twelve (12) week period in the fall of 2004. All twenty-six (26) grade 9 students in the Language Arts class consented to participate in the study. After all necessary consent forms were submitted by the participants and a meeting was held with the parents of the students to explain and clarify the goals of the research, the study began on September 14, 2004.

The research started by introducing students to the writers notebook. The writers notebook was central to the data collection process as it served as a repository for the students' writing. The writers notebook was designed to provide a space to awaken, advance, realize, dis-cover, de-velop, explore and nurture an understanding of an embodied integration in the living environment. Thematic analysis of these writers notebook entries revealed phenomenological insights of pedagogical value. All student names used in the analysis of the data were pseudonyms. Chapter 8 is devoted to a full exploration of the writers notebook. Over a period of five (5) weeks the students were encouraged to inquire into their understanding of an integrated reliance on, and an embodied relationship with, the larger living landscape. Students were requested to make entries in their writers notebooks everyday during the research period.

Writing prompts

The classroom activities, designed to allow the students the space to explore their enmeshment and interdependence in a larger living field, are imbued with ecological values - connection, openness, generosity, inquiry, dialogue and celebration. In keeping with these values, the activities were meant to challenge and affirm. As a teacher-researcher, I collaborated with the children and their diverse perspectives and experiences in re-imagining an understanding of our selves and our place in this world. Coming to awareness of, and a deeper sensibility for, our ecological enmeshment is embedded in the practical world. The classroom activities designed for this research project are based on the acceptance that the practice of living is generative and reflection on experience generates insight, awareness, and a deeper sensibility. This emerging sensibility, this learning, is ever-changing in relation to our ever-evolving experience.

As part of the data collection process, writing prompts were designed and the prompts of others (Heard, 2001; Perl, 2004) adapted to stimulate student reflection and response. The following are descriptions of the writing prompts used in the collection of data.

- **Nature Free Write** - This prompt involved taking students outside. The school building sits atop a rough outcropping of exposed rock with low lying black spruce and other flora typical of the northern boreal forest surrounding the building on three sides. Each student carefully chose a small item connected to the more than human world. Students collected twigs, stones, seed pods, various plants, fungi, leaves. Returning to the classroom, the students were led through a series of sensory activities that allowed them to experience their item through all their senses. Each student recorded minute details, first impressions, connections, memories in a manner typical of free-writing.

Using the writing generated in the free write, the students crafted free verse poems that captured their items in creative, unique and personal ways.

- **Encounters of Estrangement** - Helping students develop an attitude of attentive awareness that allows them to see, hear and sense the world around them in a way that *de-familiarizes* the familiar was important to this inquiry. We read and discussed the chapters "Educating the Eye: Staring" and "Listening to the Corn from Heard's (2001) *Writing Towards Home*. Writing activities were adapted from these chapters. Students recorded what they saw and what they heard for two minute time periods while sitting alone outside in the school yard.
- **The Writing Spot** - Adapting Heard's (2001) writing activity that involved sitting in a cafe, mall, or library and recording sights, sounds, smells, and impressions, the students identified outside places to which they were attracted. Many students readily identified places that were special to them, others found these places near their homes. A few students chose their backyard deck, shed, but most were eager to write about secret or favourite places they had visited before. Using the writers notebooks students carefully recorded their observations, thoughts, feelings, memories and reflections that emerged while they spent time in that place. They were encouraged to spend time everyday in that spot and record any changes they noticed in their surroundings and in themselves.

However, due to weather and other considerations most students were able to visit their chosen places not more than twice during the week.

Using Walker and Roth's (2000) *Keeping a nature journal; Discover a whole new way of seeing the world around you* as a model students were encouraged to sketch flora they could not identify or that struck them in some way. A small reference library was kept in the classroom to assist students with the task of identifying plants and animals they did not know. To help students understand what detail contributes to their writing and thinking we read and discussed in Goldberg's (1986) *Writing down the bones: Freeing the writer within* the chapters on writing with specificity titled "Original detail" and "The power of detail."

- **Writing with Felt Sense** - It was my goal to allow an opportunity for students to explore how their minds and bodies are connected and how meaning may emerge not solely from 'thinking' but also through 'intuition' and felt sense. Chapter 8 explores how each writing prompt and activity was designed and presented to incorporate Sondra Perl's (2004*) Guidelines for Composing*. I adapted Perl's work as a way to foster students' ability to use language through a theory of embodied knowing that would honour a stance of ecological holism. Integral to each activity was a deepening of the students' awareness of how the body itself is implicated in knowing and in the construction of knowledge. While the time frame for this research project was too brief to do much more than introduce the idea of accessing felt sense, it is my hope that students become more conscious and comfortable with drawing on felt sense to enrich their writing and their lives.

- **Artefacts** - To generate insight and explore more deeply a sense of interconnectedness and ecological embeddedness, I asked students to bring to class artefacts that symbolized for them life lived closely to the rhythms of the living landscape. The students returned to class with a wonderful collection of photographs, tools, crafts, mementos that provided rich sites for further exploration. Guided by past experience of close observation and writing for detail the students connected the objects to memories, associations and insights that opened up lines of inquiry and interpretation of great value and significance.

The writing activities based on participatory engagement and reflection were conducted in large part over the first five (5) weeks of the research project. After this period the focus of the project shifted to reading and responding to bioregional poetry.

Bioregional poetry

We live a connected existence to the wider world, to other living beings both human and non-human. The second part of the inquiry was based on the literary theory of ecocriticism (Glotfelty and Fromm, 1996; Love, 2003; Murphy, 2000) and the theory of bioregionalism and place (Sale, 2000; Relph, 1976; Tuan, 1976). The students responded to poetry written by authors who reflect our place back to us, who allow us to be open to the living landscapes in which we live connected, yet distinct lives, in relationship with our surroundings. These activities were carried out in the last five (5) weeks of the project which ended in the last week of November 2004.

The following classroom activities provided children the opportunity to write, read, discuss and engage in exploratory and participatory language events as they sought to make meaning and share their experiences of relationship with the living landscape.

- **Bioregional poetry** - One of the most fertile spaces for writing and response was created by the poetry of the bioregion. Chapter 7 explores the philosophy of bioregionalism and its connection to an experiential, complex and subtle picture of the interrelationship between humans and the places they inhabit. Chapter 7 also explores the potential of the literature of the bioregion, specifically poetry, to cultivate an imaginative and experiential engagement in children with the life of their places.

  The poetry used in this part of the study was chosen from more recent anthologies of Atlantic Canadian poets. The poems were chosen for suitability keeping in mind reading level, level of vocabulary and complexity of thought and representation. Poems representing a wide variety of topics and experiences were chosen, however, the interests and reading level of the grade 9 students guided the selection process.

From Blaine Hatt's (1983) *Easterly: 60 Atlantic writers* the following poems were selected.

This bridge is no bridge – Brian Bartlett (p. 6)
Blueflag – Elizabeth Brewster (p. 8)
Watching my grandmother pick a late flower – Allan Cooper (p. 36)
A Newfoundland garden – Percy Janes (p. 116)
The bull moose – Alden Nowlan (p. 116)
Guilt – Michael O. Nowlan (p. 120)
Crows and Bone – Kent Thompson (p. 162)

Anne Compton, Laurence Hutchman, Ross Leckie and Robin McGrath's (2002) anthology *Coastlines: The poetry of Atlantic Canada* contributed the following poems;

Presque Isle, Maine – Tammie Armstrong (p. 21)
Where I come from – Elizabeth Brewster (p. 31)
The afterlife of trees – Brian Bartlett (p. 104)
Abandoned Outport – Tom Dawe (p. 239)
Drowned – Gordon Rodgers (p. 261)
"They all save one last squirt" – John Steffler (p. 265)
Longliner at sunset – Enos Watts (p. 281)

Hugh MacDonald and Brent MacLaine's (2001) anthology *Landmarks: An anthology of new Atlantic poetry* of the land offered the following poems;

This forest in not a forest – Laurence Hutchman (p. 22)
Moving away – Penny Ferguson (p. 31)
Blomidon Beach – Deirdre Dwyer (p.36)
Apprehension – Steve Ormand (p. 42)
To find us – Deirdre Dwyer (p. 43)
From your window (the hope of heaven) – John MacKenzie (p. 51)

Students were asked to choose the poems that spoke to them in some way and to write in their notebooks personal responses to these poems. Another prompt required students to craft their own poems. Students modeled original poems on either Deirdre Dwyer's "To find us," Elizabeth Brewster's "Where I come from," or John MacKenzie's "From your window (the hope of heaven)." Each of these poems is a lyrical representation of Atlantic Canadian terrain and topography. The students followed line length and line break patterns to write poems that capture imaginatively and lyrically the local landscapes in which they live. Chapter 14 explains in detail this activity and presents samples of student poems.

Interpretive process

In this research project I wanted to describe, to make interpretive sense of the students' lifeworlds, their relationships to living landscapes *as* the children were engaged in the act of making meaning through imaginative, participatory, bodily encounters with reading and writing. Growing out of the pedagogical relationship and the practical life-enhancing telos of phenomenological inquiry, it seems natural to ask how our relationship with children may reflect a deeper, holistic, empathetic sensibility for how we may dwell rightly upon the Earth. Phenomenological insight "embraces the world as we live it, but in the process invites us to change the way we live" (Pinar, 1995, p. 413). Phenomenology's emphasis on experience and interrelationship between a person and the world has axiological dimensions that cannot be ignored by educational researchers and curriculum theorists - indeed by any human being.

When I initially undertook this line of inquiry, I will admit now that I underestimated the power of children's voices. Typically undervalued for their naiveté or innocence, the words of children have led me to open up lines of inquiry that I believe to be of particular significance. The hermeneutic phenomenological task of laying bare origins coupled with the often unstructured, unaffected visions of the child suggested profoundly interesting possibilities for me, as a researcher, living in this place at this time. As the interpretive process began and I oriented myself to meet what came before me creatively and openly, what emerged was an overlap, *a dual pedagogy*, of sorts. As the space was created, and opportunities provided, in which the children experienced deeply and re-created and re-newed an ecological sensibility so, too, was this sensibility advanced, realized, discovered and developed in me. It is through the children's words that my own understanding of ecological interconnectedness was deepened. The writing of the children pointed away from itself and reverberated within a matrix of intricacies that creatively joins up all our lives and the life of the places we in-habit. The writing collected in this project provoked new ways of seeing, engaging and understanding the world we share.

Emergence of dual pedagogies

The hermeneutic, interpretive goal of this study, originally, was to describe, to make interpretive sense of the students' lifeworlds in relation to their living landscapes. While this goal was retained throughout the inquiry and provided a strong pedagogical orientation, it became clear, as the data was interpreted, that a second and equally forceful pedagogy was being revealed. The student writing, their observations, memories, associations, insights and descriptions pointed in the direction of understanding and pedagogical insight as it related to those students' lives. Yet, in the spirit of the pedagogical relation my interpretive practice became a transformative undertaking shaping my own ecological consciousness as the dialogic journey continued and deepened in scope.

The Gadamerian notion of hermeneutics as conversation in which self-forgetfulness plays a large part guides the interpretation process in this inquiry. We "fall into conversation (1997, p. 383) according to Gadamer, and "no one knows in advance what will come out of a conversation." (p. 383) Something emerges out of a conversation, something comes into existence. It is out of the conversation, the "fusion of horizons," the transposing, or the bringing of myself to, the words of the children that understanding de-velops in the building of a shared reality. By looking closely at the words of children I also look away to commonalities and differences. Meaning and understanding are dis-covered in the nexus and interplay of that space. It is in that space that my own ecological sensibility, awareness is nurtured, cultivated, advanced, realized.

The transformative, interpretive practice further defines my own identity in the enmeshment of my lifeworld and lives of the students as revealed in their writing. It was this deepening of awareness that helped me understand the shared nature of this dialogue and engagement and how our collective understanding can be deepened and new ways of thinking may be provoked. In essence, the students' experiences with writing, reflection, responding, with artefacts, and poetry allowed some-thing to emerge – not necessarily some-thing new, but something latent, previously unknown. This some-thing that may have existed in another form was revealed, dis-covered, de-veloped.

The data collected in this study speaks to the possibility, that ecological sensibility, a deep sense of connection to a larger living field of existence, is an undeniable element in the lifeworlds of these children. This inquiry, it seems, did not provide an opportunity to create, to bring into existence such sensibility, awareness, or attunement. It became my understanding that the capacity and readiness to respond, the power to feel was always already there and needed the conditions to de-velop. The word *develop*, according to the OED, has mysterious origins. But within the early life of the word is the sense of unfolding that comes from the Latin root *villupare*. Something that exists is revealed out of an unwrapping, an unveiling lays open that which is contained within. So too, awareness, attunement, the power to feel, to be sensible, was there, latently existent, needing the conditions, the circumstances to de-velop.

Two pedagogical realities emerged out of the interpretation of the data – the students' and the researcher's. During the time I spent living with the children and their words, there arose a sense of nurturing and cultivating ecological awareness that was latent and germinal. The awareness required conditions and circumstances to be awakened and realized. For me, as researcher, the hermeneutic conversation, the reflection, and participatory engagement is transformative, radically deepening a sense of interconnectedness and bioregional wisdom, Earth centeredness and humility. It is through this inquiry that ecological sensibility in both student and researcher is aroused, awakened, discovered, developed, realized.

Overview of study

As stated above, this research project sets out to understand the question, "What are the pedagogical possibilities for nurturing ecological sensibility in children through a participatory engagement with bioregional reading and writing?"

In seeking to explore this question fully a series of sub- questions are addressed in the chapters that follow. In Chapter 4 the idea of "ecological sensibility" and how it may represent a different way of knowing is taken up. This chapter also inquires into whether ecological sensibility can be taught and, if so, how it can be taught.

Chapters 5 and 6 explore a question integral to this research - the relationship of language and ecological awareness. How is it possible to understand language as a means to foster relationship with the living world? In Chapter 6 the focus of the inquiry moves from language to literature. Specifically, experiential, reader response literary theories are opened up to determine how they may allow for creating ecological consciousness through engagement with texts. It is in this chapter that the phenomenology of literary engagement is explicated to better understand how literature is experienced and how the poietic process 'works.'

In Chapter 7 the focus moves to the theory of bioregionalism and investigates the potential for bioregional poetry to allow children to activate and re-activate an attunement and awareness for the bioregions in which they dwell.

Chapters 8 introduces the research data and interpretive process by explaining and describing the use of writers notebooks as self-reflexive, intimate spaces. Chapters 9 through 15 are devoted to the identification and explication of themes, the lived meaning that emerges out of the children's writing. In keeping with the hermeneutic phenomenological goals of the study each chapter arises out of interpretation oriented to more fully, more deeply explicating the unfolding, the de-velopment, the nurturing of ecological sensibility, awareness, and attunement. In keeping with the dual pedagogical nature of the study , the nurturing of the students' and the researcher's ecological consciousness is described as a subtle unfolding in response to experiential processes of engagement and involvement. Chapter 9 reveals a sense of *Awakening*. Tragic events and close observation allow students to describe a deep sense of relationality which may be described as an *awakening.*

Chapter 10 furthers the question of nurturing sensibility, yet implicit in the notion of becoming sensible, of intimacy, or feeling is a deeper undercurrent of apprehending with a clearness and attention to detail that may be characterized as a *Realizing*. Student writing reveals a profound sense of home-lessness and through their writing and reflection students approach a realization of the pain inherent in the deep emotional connections to the places they live.

In Chapter 11, titled *Advancing*, the shared experiencing of place, landscape, weather, the sea, and its living beings as *gifts* becomes the focus of phenomenological reflection. Several of the entries on which thematic analysis was conducted were generated by having the students pay close attention to artefacts; special objects, sea shells and bric a brac collected while beachcombing, photographs, and collectibles. The chapter traces the movement of the students toward insight and greater meaning. The student writing often reveals an approaching, a progression, an 'advancing' closer to a deeper attentiveness and thoughtfulness of what is represented by the artefact. The student writing and the use of the word *gift* to describe many aspects of the living world opened up the opportunity for me, as researcher, to inquire further into the phenomenology of the gift exchange and understand how the exchange may advance our understanding of the reciprocal processes that underlie human relations with the Earth and its other living beings. The inquiry then turns, in Chapter 12 through 14, to explicating the students' experience with reading, and response to, the poetry of the bioregion.

Chapter 12: *Discovering* is based on the students' writing and reflection coming out of their engagement with bioregional poetry. By immersing the students in the poetry of writers who have painstakingly and profoundly, even joyously, learned the cultural and ecological identity of the places they in-habit, it became evident that some-thing was being dis-closed, re-vealed to the student writers. In many cases it was as if something was being truly dis-covered, by the students for the first time. In other instances there was the distinct sense that the students were dis-covering their places by being brought to fuller knowledge, greater awareness. The students, in many ways, shared with the poets the experience of what it means to that poet to live in place.

Chapter 13: *Understanding* builds on the previous chapter and illustrates the depth of the students' receptivity to the poets and their work. This chapter is dedicated to more closely exploring the student response to one poem in particular- New Brunswick poet Michael O. Nowlan's poem titled *Guilt*. The deeply felt responses to this one poem seemed to evoke an *understanding*, a comprehending, an apprehending of the violence that often characterizes the relationship between humans and the other species with whom we share our places. Also, undeniably, what surfaced out of the student responses was a deep and visceral *understanding* in the word's other sense. It is an *understanding*, a sensibility *to*, realized as a tacit implying of compassion and empathy.

The penultimate chapter before the concluding remarks demonstrates the results of the students' own efforts to render their experience of place in poetry. In the imitative assuming of a poet's language and style the students *create* their own way of seeing, opening fresh and complex images and connections. This chapter titled *Creating* is a culminating one, in which students write their own poems to respond out of the depths of their experience. It is a reaching toward insight, the *creating* of meaning.

Chapter 15 concludes the study and offers possibilities to guide the future direction of curriculum studies.

Chapter 4: The Nature of Ecological Sensibility

Critical to this study is the clarification of the notion of ecological sensibility. Ecology can be located in two domains; first, in the emotional and felt significance of our relationships with the more-than-human world, and second, in processes of signification and symbolic representation, that is, in the languages and disciplines that address those relationships. I do not use the word *ecological* as a metaphor, as is often the case in literature looking at the ecology of literacy and language in education. Ecology in these cases becomes a figure of speech that *excludes* the living world and describes interrelationships, webs and systems of social exchanges between two or more human beings. Barton (2002) refers to the *metaphor* of ecology when he explains that "an ecological approach aims to understand how literacy is embedded in other human activity, its embeddedness in social life and thought, and its position in history, in language and learning" (p. 140). In this study I use the notion of ecology as a way to open human awareness to our fundamental participation in the biotic community – in our bioregion. Ecological understanding is associated with the following commonalities: a focus on relationships, interdependence, interconnectedness. These relationships are understood explicitly to be nested in a larger web of relations that include both the cognitive and the biological; accordingly, ecological relationships are complex and holistic, implicating the infinite in the particular (Orr, 1992, 1994; Sessions, 1995; Thomashow, 1995; Capra, 2002).

The term *sensibility* grounds the inquiry in lived experience. Learning to awaken and interpret our bodily felt experience of the claims of the biotic community is at heart a pedagogical and practical task. There is also a moral and ethical imperative present in this project as children are invited to acknowledge the human-nature relationship *as* a relationship. The demand here is to find ways to talk about the human-nature relationship that do not place humans outside of the natural world, that is, to clarify how it is we relate to the more-than-human while also being an embodied part of a bioregion, involved in its processes.

Beginning with experience

As indicated above, to be sensible, to make sense, or to nurture one's sensibility is in direct reference to the power or faculty of feeling, to the capacity for sensation and emotion. Sensibility is to be understood, as it will be used in this inquiry, as an attunement, and a felt awareness, a renewal of the senses. This understanding leads to an exploration of experience, the relational, and a sense for the interactive and dialogical nature of reality. The approach taken in this project will be firmly established in the experiential with theoretical support from the philosophical traditions of phenomenology and hermeneutics.

Understanding sensibility as I propose to draw the concept together relies largely on the thinking of Andy Fisher (2002) and Eugene Gendlin (1981; 1985; 1988; 1992a; 1992b; 1997a; 1997b). Gendlin describes the process of experiencing as the interaction between *feelings* and *symbols*. "Symbol," as Gendlin uses it, casts a wide net and hearkens back to the Greek words "sum-ballein" from which the word symbol is derived, meaning "to draw or throw together." A symbol then gathers and calls forth a confluence of meanings that are felt when we interact with it. Rich symbols are those with the greatest power to stir us. In Gendlin's thought *anything* we meaningfully encounter can be a symbol. To put it simply, whatever we experience – a classroom, a windy winter day, a dream, a photograph – symbolizes that experience immediately (Gendlin, 1981). Fisher (2002) suggests that we may find *further* ways to symbolize the experience – by painting, dancing or composing a poem – or we may find no other symbols for the experience at all. The symbol is the direct form of the experience. "It is some figure of awareness; a thought, a behavior, a sight, a sound, an emotion … an image, a rite, an event, some words" (Fisher, 2002, p. 56).

The *feeling* is the on-going, concrete, bodily sensitivity that accompanies and interacts with these symbols: "the felt background that lends meaning or sense to the figure" (Fisher, 2002, p. 56). Feeling is the sense, the felt meaning we have in relation to what we are experiencing. Fisher makes the point that "felt meaning is only explicitly known when given some symbolic form that houses and so completes the meaning" (2002, p. 57). Without a felt sense for something, this thing is essentially meaningless to us; it is in the dimension of feeling that something is experienced. Gendlin's experiential approach acknowledges that there is a felt or experiential dimension to everything, that the world is intelligible only because of the feeling tone that pervades, usually *unnoticed*, all our being, thinking and doing. Heidegger called this quality *befindlicheit* – the mood-wise situatedness of being (Gendlin, 1992a). Feelings are our bodily grasping at all that is "nonfocal" in the moment; they are our sensing, in an amalgam, the many background meanings that are at play or seem relevant to us in any given situation. "Feelings are more fuzzy and diffuse than emotions, less distinct or clear, because they contain…many meanings in a pre-reflective mass" (Fisher, 2002, p. 57). Upon entering a room for the first time, my feelings, if I pay close attention, will deepen the meaning of my experience and may inform or augment my *thinking* about the experience of entering the strange room.

The meaning of sensibility is tied directly to the interaction with something of symbolic character that arouses feeling in us. Symbols and feelings are thus mutually formative or determining: the traffic between them moves in both directions. Fisher points out that the *difference* between feelings and symbols is most noticeable when we have a feeling, but can find no words to express it. Then, he advises, we must stay with the feeling and wait until the right word-symbols come (2002, p. 56). The work of both Fisher and Gendlin will be important in understanding how ecological sensibility , a felt-sense for our embeddedness in larger life processes, may be nurtured and "called-forth" by the experience of engaging with the "word symbols" of bioregional poetry. Gendlin's thinking, in particular, gives us a language to help us understand how "literature works." This is a brief introduction of ideas that will be given a more thorough treatment in Chapter 5.

The impetus for this research project was born out of a "felt-sense" – one that may be described as alienation and loss. The children whose lives were disrupted, the families and communities devastated by the culmination of decades of over-fishing and a blatant disregard for the life of the marine ecosystem, resulted in my own disquiet over the violation and degradation of the human and non-human. The sensibility I hope to understand comes out of a tradition that takes seriously that we too are nature (Fox, 1995;

Sessions, 1995). It asserts that we belong to the natural order, and are claimed by it as well as limited by it, and we feel its demands within our bodily experience. I call upon my experience, on my conversations with children, on their words as revealed in their writers notebooks to understand that we carry the pervasive mistreatment of both the human and the non-human in our bodies. In reflecting on what it means to be *sensible*, to nurture *sensibility*, we are led inevitably to identify the life-denying aspects of our culture, and open ourselves to the call of a more life-centered world.

Teaching and learning ecological sensibility

The leading of children into a deeper sense of their relatedness to a living whole, to invite children to pay close attention to the sensible and the interplay of the world and the felt-sense within them, is inherently a pedagogical undertaking. It also has a profound moral and ethical dimension. In what sense is there an ecological imperative, (Lingis, 1999) a claim and a demand made on us to address sensitively (sensibly) how we will provision ourselves with food, energy, water, livelihood, health and shelter in a sustainable mutually enhancing manner? For the purposes of this inquiry it is important to ask if ecological sensibility can be taught. And if so, how might it be taught? I look for insight into these questions in the work of Nell Noddings (1984, 2002) and her theory of care, in the interpretation of pedagogy by Max van Manen (1991, 2002), and in the philosophy of ethical responsibility as explicated by Emmanuel Levinas (1985, 1989) and Alphonso Lingis (1998).

The human journey through life is undeniably a relational one. We grow and realize our potential as we move into deeper and wider contact with the world. As we enter into more encompassing realms of otherness we build a sense of commonality and belonging with others. The sense that our relationality should extend beyond the human realm is tacit; there is shared recognition that our humanity is incomplete until we have established our relations with the larger natural world. The Alberta and New Foundland curricula acknowledge, albeit superficially, this human need to feel at home in the world, (Alberta Learning, 2002; Government of Newfoundland, 2001) but they falter in how to achieve it. As previously discussed, learning about the natural world for most children in Canada is done in the science classroom. The learning emphasizes information, the resolution of problems with pollution and "resource management."

The question that arises for us is, "What are the implications of educating our children to define and identify the world and all its living entities in this way?" Are we in fact abrogating our pedagogical duty to children – a duty that includes, "tactful sensitivity to a child's subjectivity…an interpretive intelligence, a passion for knowing and learning the mysteries of the world" (van Manen, 1991, p. 8)? Paradoxically, many curriculum developers and teachers believe that scientific knowledge of our living environments will translate into ecological sensibility, a sense of the interrelatedness of all things, and a respect for the complexity of life systems and hence a restrained use of natural resources (Russell, 2000). This claim requires careful analysis.

Ecology units in middle school science or secondary school environmental science courses contain the highly technical expectations of monitoring, sampling, identifying, assessing, investigating and analyzing. However, each course invariably contains outcomes that state that students are expected to "*appreciate* nature and the need to conserve areas for future generations to enjoy" (Alberta Learning, 2002). Similarly, high school students taking Environmental Science 3205 in Newfoundland and Labrador are expected to "demonstrate an *appreciation* of the natural environment", and "develop a sense of personal responsibility and empowerment in relation to the environment" (Government of Newfoundland and Labrador, 2001).

I am struck by how often the word *appreciate* is found across outcomes, science courses and grade levels. Van Manen (1997) reminds us that words can become emptied of the meaning with which they were once imbued and paying close attention to words can "put us in touch with an original form of life where the terms still have living ties to lived experience" (p. 59). This is true of the word appreciate. It derives from the Late Latin *appretiare* – the action of setting a money value, or setting a price on something. I want to believe that the word appreciate is used in curriculum documents to convey another sense, a more subtle, sympathetic understanding of "intelligent notice, esp. perception of delicate impressions" (OED, 2002). But I am not confident. I believe the authors used the word in the sense of holding nature in high esteem, of having great *value* and I am reminded of Wendell Berry's (2000) words, "people exploit what they have merely concluded to be of value, but they defend what they love" (p. 39).

Finally, students in Newfoundland and Labrador, in accordance with the prescribed curriculum, will "demonstrate optimism that we as human *dwellers* of the planet can live in *harmony* with the natural environment" while understanding that "the human race relies on the environment and therefore must manage it wisely" (emphasis added, Government of Newfoundland and Labrador, 2001). Despite, the heavy "resourcist" bias in these outcomes that assumes the Earth exists solely for human use and consumption, each curriculum document I reviewed has, in addition to the conceptual knowledge and skills of the science outcomes, the more affective, emotive outcomes of demonstrating the virtues of *sensitivity*, *personal responsibility, appreciation.* However, as one outcome statement clearly indicates there is really no room for *emotion* in developing these attitudes. Grade 7 students in Alberta are expected to "identify, *objectively*, potential conflicts between responding to human wants and protecting the environment" (Alberta Learning, 2002).

These affective outcomes included in the science curriculum are important. One can assume that they were written after much thought and deliberation and with the best intentions. We are in need of a sensitive, caring, ecologically literate society as in no time in the past. These important affective outcomes rest on an assumption that the more *knowledge* our children have the more likely they are to make wise and responsible choices, demonstrate sensitivity and empathetic appreciation in their relationship with the natural world.

The attainment of virtues like sensitivity, responsibility, empathy is not commensurate with the knowledge we possess. History and our own experience tell us this. However, one the most vexing philosophical and pedagogical questions is, "Can virtues be taught?" This query has been with us for centuries (Aristotle, 1985; Ryle, 1975) and continues to be controversial today (Noddings, 2002) with a renewed interest in character education initiatives in schools in the United States and Canada. Nell Noddings' work on care theory posits that virtues cannot be taught directly but are "defined situationally and relationally" (2002, p.2). Noddings locates her theory of care in both feminism and pragmatic naturalism (1984, 2002). We, as carers, Nodding believes, attend because we want to; "we love the ones who address us or have sufficient positive regard for them, or the request is so consonant with ordinary life that no inner conflict occurs" (2002, p. 13). Noddings describes this relation or encounter as one of "natural caring" – the *I must* as an expression of desire or inclination- not a recognition of duty.

Care theory does include the more-than-human relationship, but tangentially. Noddings' does not make the life-denying tendencies of our culture central to her thinking, or consider what shifts may occur in our relationships when we include our connection to the web of life around us as essential to human well-being. Recent readings of Levinasian ethics are asking if Levinas' philosophy of the Other (autrui) can be made inclusive of the non-human (Lingis, 1999; Llewelyn, 1991). Scholars are widening the scope of human relations and our accountability to and responsibility for the non-human as Other and as a source of ethical obligation (Deihm, 2003).

Ecological sensibility is in the same way *relational* and could be considered a way of being; it is to be attentive, attuned, aware with a well-developed capacity to demonstrate concern and a desire to act in a manner that reflects our affinity and affiliation with the larger natural world. It is this *relation* that is at the heart of ecological sensibility rather than any one virtue. Noddings' theory does not pursue the source of the ethical imperative to care, other than it being natural. I believe Gendlin's (1997) ideas about the "intelligent body" as self -organizing with inherent wisdom finely tuned to "living responsiveness" may provide phenomenological insight into how we come to *feel* the "I must" or the moral imperative. I take up this analysis in Chapter 6.

Central to Noddings' (2002) work are her components of moral education. She outlines four components: modeling, dialogue, practice, and confirmation. Modeling and dialogue will be instrumental to this study as a means to teach, or more aptly, to nurture ecological sensibility in children. Writers, those authors who have "given voice to the essential fullness of life and landscape", may serve as exemplars for how to live our lives as participants belonging to the larger life processes. Noddings also emphasizes the "power of story" (2002, p. 44) and the sensitive, thoughtful use of literature to arouse emotion, compassion and critical thinking.

The second component, dialogue, as open-ended, careful listening and attending is " the most fundamental component of the care model" (Noddings, 2002, p. 16). It is also at the heart of the pedagogical relation. Attending to the other, to children's thoughts, feelings, memories, experiences, and questions as they come out of their reading and responding may serve as a space to deepen the child's understanding of their place in the world and to nurture further wonder. Dialogue called forth by literature will inevitably involve questions that require knowledge, reasoning and perhaps even debate. But it is important to be mindful that when young people question, we must be careful not to close off wonder and further exploration with "answers." Van Manen (2002) shows that the question "what" something is, is preceded by the wonder "that" something is.

> What is that?" asks for a time of dialogue, time to think, to wonder, to marvel… Naming something is more than learning to label it. In the act of naming we bring something before us. Naming something is getting to know something in its *whatness* and *thatness.* In our naming we develop a

> new familiarity with the things; we begin to recognize our "selves" in the world around us. (p. 15,16)

This type of questioning and dialogue call upon the language of the pedagogical – a particular, personal, passionate language. What are the possibilities to teach or to nurture ecological sensibility through language and imagination - the capacities that make us truly human?

The grade 9 language arts classroom, introduced in Chapter 2, demonstrates a different way of knowing. The teacher reads and the students seem to internalize the experience, the words, the sounds, and some–thing is evoked. One boy is engaged by an immediate felt-sense (Bleich, 1978, p. 52) and blurts out in response to the John S. Mitchell poem, "It's like he's being watched or something… It's a creepy feeling isn't it?" The language has the capacity to intensify cognitive and emotional experience. On hearing the lines of Allan Cooper's poem Katie connects up the poet's words with her life and renders beautifully and imagistically her grandfather's hands "formed" by the sea. Her grandfather is seemingly embedded in a part of this powerful life force. There is no abstraction here, nothing to be explained. The students respond to the literature drawing on feelings, memories, life histories, stories and experiences. Katie is beginning to respond in the language of sensibility, of intimacy, of respect and affection for a culture, place and people. Her response includes an intergenerational recognition of the ongoing interdependence of the human and more-than-human world.

Chapter 5: Ecological Sensibility and Relationship to Language

Nell Noddings (1991; 2002) argues for the use of stories and "the general recognition that stories have enormous power" (2002, p. 45) in the development of the moral imagination. However, she does not explore phenomenologically the capacity of language to move us in life-forwarding directions toward care for the other. How does language arouse powerful feelings? How do stories exercise the moral imagination? The works of Fisher (2002), Gendlin (1981; 1987) and others (Levin, 1997; Wallulis, 1997) investigate phenomenologically the experiencing interaction between feelings and symbols and describe experientially the *power* of language.

How do we experience word-symbols and what do they mean? Both scholars, Gendlin and Fisher, believe that our bodies *understand* language. Gendlin pioneered the practice of focusing in which attention is turned to our bodies in order to get a sense of the whole mass of meanings that are implicitly functioning in relation to some situation in our lives. By attending to these feelings we can learn to live more awarely. Gendlin (1996) says; "Your body enacts your situations and constitutes them largely before you can think how." (p. 304) According to Fisher (2002), feelings cannot be fooled or bypassed, we cannot impose whatever meaning we like on our experience. We may tell ourselves something, convince ourselves or others, however this "does not satisfy what our bodies are calling for." (p. 62) "While language use is in important respects different from a behaviour such as eating," says Fisher, "it is also the same inasmuch as they both carry our lives forward." (p. 62) The conversation or book that is tedious or senseless is meaningless; it passes by us and does nothing for our lives. But when someone says something that is deeply meaningful and relevant to us, "it touches us right at the center of our living or opens up some sense that helps move our lives along" (Fisher, 2002, p.63). Or conversely, as Susan Griffin (1992) observes, "when a lie is told the body is cast into a state of profound disturbance" (p. 330). This is the relationship of being and language to which I am committed in the fostering of ecological sensibility - language that is *of* the order of experiencing, and not simply a stamp *on* it (Gendlin, 1987).

"Storytelling," writes the novelist Barbara Kingsolver (1998), "is as old as our need to remember where the water is. It's as persistent as our desire to teach our children how to live in this place that we have known longer than they have" (p. 17). In these words Kingsolver touches on something at the core of what it means to be human and live fully in this world. Language - words spoken, written in story - prose or poetry, point to experience allowing us "to remember where the water is." Much has been written about our most fundamental human capacity. The Western world's greatest thinkers, from the Greeks down through the ages to the post-structuralists, have turned their analytic and philosophic gaze upon language in all its forms. Our culture holds widely shared and deeply embedded beliefs and assumptions about our use of language. Currently, the notion that meaning and language are grounded in the life process, and that we are capable of a felt-sense of what is for or against this process, is likely to be considered naïve and essentialist. In this present postmodern era characterized by a "crisis of representation" (Greene, 1994), there is a preoccupation with linguistic idealism and social constructivism that understands the world, including the more-than-human world, as an artifact of language (Vogel, 1996; Guzzoni, 1996).

Terry Eagleton (1996) believes the postmodern is a shift from the body as subject to body as object; " the finest body book…Merleau-Ponty's *The* (sic) *Phenomenology of*

Perception... with its humanist sense of body as practice and project is for some [postmodern] thinkers distinctly *passé*" (p. 71). Many recent thinkers, such as Michel Foucault, view the body as simply a surface on which history imprints itself and power is inscribed. "For Merleau-Ponty… the body is 'where there is something to be done;' for the new somatics, the body is where something- gazing, imprinting, regulating- is being done to you" (Eagleton, 1996, p. 71). "The ruling assumption is that there is no nature, no human nature, no truth, no rightness, other than whatever variant has been programmed into us by culture" (Gendlin, 1992b). There is no doubt that the ways people see and value nature are strongly influenced by their cultural context; understandings of the non-human world differ widely by culture and historical era. However, stronger forms of cultural constructivism suggest that the more-than-human receives its identity and significance *only through human discourses and practice*. It is an ontological view of language as not so much representing the Earth as constituting it (Peterson, 1999). This is in keeping with the deconstructionist conclusion that language does not ultimately refer to anything, that all meaning is merely an "effect" issuing from the play of signifiers. If so, then meaning is arbitrary, relativistic and essentially leans toward nihilism. In this sense, there is no world "out there" existing independent of human symbolization and cognition. It may be argued, then, in this sense, the postmodern is in line with Cartesian dualism and the Enlightenment project. Language is used to separate the human realm from the natural world. This is perhaps best represented by Baudrillard's (1992) simulacra, the constantly shifting and changing values independent of any underlying "reality" that claims "our true environment is the universe of communication" (in Kidner, p. 348). In this view our experiencing is entirely determined by the symbolic order, which is itself limited to cultural-historical-linguistic forms.

What is not taken into account in the postmodernist view is an organic, bodily-felt, responding moment within this experiencing. Most postmodernist thinkers do not allow for how symbolic forms and experiencing *interact in a life process* (Fisher, 2002, p. 63). Meaning, therefore, is located solely in language, rather than in the bodily living-in- the-world that *includes* language. In *Sources of the Self: The Making of Modern Identity,* Charles Taylor (1989) sees our culture's identity as shaped by the disengaged, instrumental rationalism of the Enlightenment and believes there is something amiss in our modern disconnection from nature. Taylor wishes we could reconnect with a sense that "the world is not simply an ensemble of objects for our use, but makes a further claim on us" (p. 513). He cites an example of the poet Rilke's "making inward" as an ontological and spiritual demand emanating from the world for attention, scrutiny and respect toward what is there. Most relevant for this research project is Taylor's suggestion for how we might renew a connection with the world. It is through language. Taylor believes our only hope for correcting the disengaged consciousness of modernity is to focus on new languages of "personal resonance" (p. 513).

Katie, the young girl by the window in the Grade 9 classroom, uses language of "personal resonance." After listening to a poem about the ocean, she takes up the written word – words rich in imagery and metaphor and writes the sea into the lines she reads on her grandfather's hands. Down the hall the grade 8 science class uses language very differently – to name, to categorize, analyze. The children see and record the observable facts. In each classroom language is used to know our world in very different ways.

However, as humans we do not only see, but also sense. We are attuned to presence, can see and speak it, and also write it. Philosopher and phenomenologist Erazim Kohak (1984) reminds us that language, words, should not be considered "intruders interposing themselves as a veil between humans and being" (p. 47). He says that may be so when we consider 'being' to be meaningless, dead, inert, merely artifacts of our own making, then "there is no meaning to which our words could point" (p. 47). Kohak says, "Discourse would first have to create meaning and impose it on the meaningless world so that as Jacques Derrida would have it, a discourse could describe nothing but meaning it itself brought into being" (1984, p. 48).

Discourse, according to Kohak, is no more than a monologue of our species *unless* we recognize that what surrounds and penetrates us, the living Earth, is "not merely being but, primordially, meaningful being" (p. 48). As Paul Ricoeur (1977) reminds us, something must *be* for something to be said – there must be meaning to which our words point, not as intruders or impositions, but as expressions of the life process – of a living, felt, knowing. Kohak believes the word is not philosophy's handicap – it is a gift (1984, p. 47).

In this research I hope to invoke this sense of language. By allowing children a space in which to sit with their felt sense, the memories, thoughts, and anecdotes called forth in response to what they read and experience, they may become attuned to the unity of body and world and hence move toward a deeper ecological sensibility. I will return to a discussion of how a deeper understanding of literary engagement as a focal practice (Sumara, 2002) may emerge through a sensitive phenomenological dialogue that attempts to elaborate on current theoretical treatments of reader response.

Ecocriticism and literary theory

Studying the pedagogical possibilities to nurture ecological sensibility through a participatory engagement with literature requires a careful questioning of the role of literature. We have already seen how story is used in the exercise of the moral imagination (Noddings, 2002). But specifically, for this inquiry, I am interested in exploring children's response to and experience with nature-oriented, bioregional literature. I borrow the term "nature-oriented literature" from literary scholar Patrick D. Murphy (2000) whose applies the term to any text

> having nonhuman nature itself as a subject, character or major component of the setting, or to a text that says something about human -nonhuman interaction, human philosophies about nature, or the possibility of engaging nature by means of or in spite of human culture. (p. 1)

How might our children's experience with nature-oriented literature adapt them better to life on the Earth, to the life of their bioregions, rather than serve to estrange them from it? How might literature and response to literature support the welfare and survival of the Earth community? What insights might it offer into human relationships with other species and with each other, and the larger world around us? How might this endeavour be seen as much more than a narrow environmentalism? How might writers of bioregional literature model a generative way of being - a sensibility, a pathic, felt awareness and a consciousness that embraces a world view that nurtures a sense that we can be present to the Earth in a mutually enhancing manner? In Gendlin-ian terms, what felt-sense might be "called forth" through interacting with the symbolic form of literature?

In this inquiry, I focus on the opportunities provided to children to engage with nature-oriented literature of the bioregion. I describe and make interpretative sense of this engagement. The children's responses to literature, their anecdotes, memories, reflections, the opportunities that arise to "trace the text out into the world" (Willinsky, 1990, p. 90) are attended to carefully and thoughtfully for phenomenological insights of pedagogical value.

Placing literature in the larger living field as part of a hermeneutic, relational, dialogical human activity is a very recent development. Contemporary literary criticism is a field in a permanent state of flux. Critical approaches from the formalist New Critical through Marxist, psychological, reader-response to revisionist deconstruction, post-colonial and post-structural cultural critique make for a sometimes disorienting study characterized by the rise and quick disappearance of many approaches. Despite a few individual literary and cultural scholars who have been developing an ecologically informed criticism (White, 1967; Reuckert, 1978; Love; 1990) literary scholarship has been an exclusively anthropocentric, humanist endeavour. Cheryl Glotfelty (1996) comments that if our knowledge of the outside world was limited to what we could infer from major publications in literary studies, we would quickly discern an *academic* scholarship in the sense of "scholarly to the point of being unaware of the outside world with a preoccupation with the 'hot topics' of race, class and gender" (p. xiv).

The critique of "centrism" as in ethnocentrism and Eurocentrism when certain discourses dominate others in power relations (Foucault, 1988) draws on historical situatedness. Stanley Fish (1980) sums up the central tenet of the critique concisely: "We are never not in a situation" (p. 276). Ironically, it was not until very recently that literary criticism began to turn its gaze to how humans are "in" the world. As the ecologist Paul Shepard (1969) writes, "Man is in the world and his ecology is the nature of that in-ness" (p. 131). Perhaps in light of the deeply embedded modernist view of the nature-culture divide the lack of awareness in literary theory of place, landscape and the larger Earth is not at all surprising.

In 1991 a Modern Languages Association special session on ecology and literary studies led to the forming of the Association for the Study of Literature and the Environment (ASLE) in 1992 with the mission: "to promote the exchange of ideas and information pertaining to literature that considers the relationship between humans and the natural world" and to "encourage nature writing, traditional and innovative scholarly approaches to environmental literature and interdisciplinary environmental research" (Glotfelty, 1996, p. xviii). The term "ecocriticism" has been attributed to William Reuckert (1978) who first used it to describe this emerging literary study. The distinguished scholarly journal *New Literary History* featured a special edition devoted to ecocriticism in 1999 and the journal's editorial attempted to define the evolving critique in this way:

> Ecocriticism challenges interpretation to own its grounding in the bedrock of natural fact, in the biospheric and indeed planetary conditions without which human life, much less humane letters, could not exist. Ecocriticism thus claims as its hermeneutic horizon nothing short of the literal horizon

> itself, the finite environment that a reader or writer occupies thanks not just to culturally coded determinants but also natural determinants that antedate these, and will outlast them.
>
> (Cohen, 1999, p. 505)

Ecocritical literary theory de-centers the human in a non-anthropocentric shift based on two premises:

> 1. There is a material world and
> 2. Human culture is connected to the material world, affecting it and affected by it. Ecocriticism takes as its subject the interconnectedness between the material world and human culture, specifically the cultural artifacts of language and literature. As a critical stance, it has one foot in literature and the other on land; as a theoretical discourse, it negotiates between text and terra firma.
>
> (Glotfelty, in Murphy, 2000, p. 17)

Murphy (2000) has described ecocriticism as a movement rather than a method comparing its emergence to the historical evolution of feminist theory and criticism. This is not at all surprising considering the nuances and associations of ecology as a "subversive science" (Shepard, 1969), as a means of "dwelling" (Foltz, 1997) or as a "greater overriding wisdom [that is] universal" (Shepard, 1999).

The question seems to be whether it is possible to maintain a conception of nature as external to us, as existing independently of thought and language, at the same time acknowledging that the ways we sense the living Earth are deeply affected by cultural and personal factors. This play of separateness and interdependence between the human and the living landscape can nurture a re-integration in, and respect for, the mysteries of the Earth. Theory and ecology can point to the myriad of influences outside ourselves that form vast complex networks, in essence "texts" written by "larger and stronger forces" (Campbell, 1996, 134). Campbell goes on to say,

> But surely one of the most important forces is the rest of the natural world. How close we are to the land as we are growing up and when we are grown, how we learn to see our relationship to it. Our choices … depend on the shape of our lives, how we've been taught- and especially on the role the land itself played in what we might call the writing of our textuality. (p. 137)

This writing of our textuality requires a new language dependent on a critique that may open up old dualisms between nature/culture, matter/spirit and challenge established discourses. I see this as a duty. We cannot ignore the wisdom of other cultures and traditions, the words of writers who give voice to the essential fullness of life and landscape. It is a duty that calls forth the *life* inherent in language, language that articulates our places, our classrooms as multi-faceted, vital spaces in which the interdependencies of our lives and all life become central to all we do. This critical stance, an ecocritical stance, is central to a conception of literature as means to engage others in a felt sense of our connection to a larger living field.

Textuality as embodied integration

Twentieth century philosophy has made language its central, guiding concern. Unfortunately, this has done little to allay our separateness and alienation from the world; rather it has been argued that philosophy's preoccupation with language has exacerbated the rein of dualism, for now it is language that is severed from the rest of the world (Smith, 1999; Peterson, 1999; Kidner, 2000). M.C. Dillon refers to a "semiological reductionism" best characterized by Derridean deconstruction "in which all sense–making is believed to be trapped and endlessly refracted within the play between linguistic signs, such that no reference is even possible to a reality outside of or transcendent to human language" (in Fisher, 2002, p. 127). However, an ecological stance and phenomenological insight have much to offer a way of thinking about language and experiencing language that situates it "*within* this world, as an expression *of* it" (Fisher, 2002, p. 127). As with Erazim Kohak's notion of the word as a "gift," it is to language that we can turn to better comprehend the relationship between our defining human capacity, meaning and the living Earth. This is emerging as a fascinating study that others (Abrams, 1996; Abrams & Jardine, 2000; Jardine, 1999, 2000; Gendlin; 1992a, 1992b) are beginning to pursue. Language is being understood more often in generative terms as a "natural reservoir of variation, a sea of possibilities. As such, language is not just a way to express intelligence but a principle source" (Davis, et. al, 2000, p.127). Humberto Maturana emphasizes that the phenomenon of language does not occur in the brain, but in "a continual flow of coordinations of coordinations of behaviour" (in Capra, 2002, p. 54). It occurs, according to Maturana, "in the flow of interactions and relations of living together" (in Capra, 2002, p. 54).

Pointing to our inherency in language as a pathic, fully embodied experience Merleau-Ponty believed that languages are different "ways for the human body to sing the world's praises" (2002a, p. 187). Speech and thought are, according to Merleau-Ponty "the perceptible world's explosion within us" (2002a, p. 187). In *The Visible and the Invisible* Merleau-Ponty writes, "Language is a life, is our life and the life of things… it is an error of the semantic philosophies to close up language as if it spoke only of itself" (2002b, p. 94). Merleau-Ponty calls language "a bubbling up at the bottom of … mute experience," and "the very voice of the trees, the waves and the forest" (2002b, p. 155).

Gendlin (1992a) also uses the metaphor of feelings *arising* or coming *up* in us as we experience the world. He writes of feeling as a "lifting out" and this lifting out leads to articulation, "the feeling knows how to speak and demands just the right words. The feeling, more exactly, is sufficient to bring the words to the person's speech" (Gendlin, 1992a, p. 52). This is not to put forward that language arises from some untainted "natural conduit," however it is to say that language arises from "the perceptual interplay between the body and the world" (Abram, 1996, p. 273). In this view Fisher (2002) says that language

> originates as a kind of gesture that draws its meaning from our contact with the world, but our perception of this world is itself structured by language already sedimented into it. That is to say, our linguistic symbols not only make the world intelligible but in doing so also *change* the world, bringing it forth in a way that favours a particular view or

> interpretation… language on the one hand, and the phenomenal world, on the other, form two open systems which mirror and feed one another; that the world knows itself as it is reflected in language, and language knows itself as it is reflected in the actual world. (p. 128)

This is a vision of language as a symbolic system inextricably webbed with and emerging out of the world we experience. The vision offers a relational, deeply interconnected sense of language. It opens up a sense that reading, writing and response, the space of transaction between reader and writer draws a particular power from an inherently organic, sensorial matrix – an interconnected reality. This vision stands in stark contrast to a closed system of language that floats above the world, disconnected from experience, signs endlessly referring to other signs in a perpetual deferral of meaning.

Current curriculum documents tend to reflect a technical rationality when describing our relationship to language. For example, in outlining the "principles underlying" the English language arts (Alberta Learning, 2000) the documents indicate a strong constructivist stance. Language is described as "a powerful tool," a "primary instrument" (Alberta Learning, 2000) from which "meaning is constructed" (Government of Newfoundland, 2000). It is a view that understands students' experience with language to be primarily concerned with "strategies and processes," of "solving information problems" (Government of Newfoundland, p. 3). How might our view of language, reading, writing and response change if approached as integral to an inclusive community of interrelated presences? Borgmann (1992) hints at this emerging relationship when he says,

> The only reality author and reader can be sure of are traces of ink on a page. These marks, no matter how real, would forever be silent were they not embedded in a communal context wherein they invite and instruct the reader to recall and call for a certain reality. A text by itself is helpless; to require help is its virtue. The requirements for its vitality are the existence of a literate community and the presence of an eloquent reality. These certainly should be the conditions of life. (p. 117)

The interrelatedness and interdependencies inherent in reading and writing make it truly an ecological endeavour. Martha Nussbaum (1990) writes, "a community is formed by author and readers" (p. 48). This community is enriched if it is inclusive and makes room for other voices, other presences, if it is expanded to include all life. Nussbaum continues by saying, "In this community separateness and qualitative difference are not neglected… But at the same time it is stressed that *living together* is the object of our ethical interest" (1990, p. 48).

Textuality is at the heart of experience directing our attention to the unique, to the world of particulars, to emotion and insight. Gary Snyder (1990) moves textuality out into the physical world.

> The stratigraphy of rocks, layers of pollen in a swamp, the outward expanding circles in the trunk of a tree, can be seen as texts. The calligraphy of rivers winding back and forth over the land leaving layer upon layer of traces of previous

> riverbeds is text. The layers of history in language become a text of language itself. (p. 66)

In *The Crafty Reader* Robert Scholes (2001) also alludes to the inherency of language, of text in an embodied integration in who we are as human beings living in the world.

> Textuality runs deep, since all human beings can be seen as textual animals in more than one sense. First of all, like every living thing we replicate ourselves through the transmission of genetic information coded in nucleonic acids, DNA and RNA. We are biologically, the result of a textual process. We have been scripted. Beyond that, of course, human beings are born into linguistic and cultural heritages that are themselves powerful texts, shaping our possibilities and impossibilities, and we function amid webs of information carried by various audible, visual, and verbal media that shape the ways we live and die. We never escape textuality and if we live after death, it will be textually, in signs- memories, photographs, words, in pixels, or on a page or cut into stone. (p. 78)

Gadamer (1986, p. 114) seems to capture a similar sense of text as that described by Snyder and Scholes by what he refers to as "nearness" or "a making ourselves at home" in language;

> A genuine poem allows us to experience "nearness" in such a way that this nearness is held in and through the linguistic

> form of the poem… This is not a romantic theory but a straight forward description of fact that language gives all of us our access to the world in which certain special forms of human experience arise … the poetic word by being there bears witness to our being. (pp. 114, 115)

Yet, at the same time, literature provides for what Ricoeur (1981) calls a hermeneutic *distanciation* – "the intentional movement of consciousness towards meaning" (p. 116). Ricoeur explains that all consciousness of meaning involves a distanciation, "a distancing from 'lived experience' as purely and simply adhered to … when not content to 'live' or 'relive' we interrupt lived experience in order to signify it" (1981, p. 116). Ricoeur understands text as much more than a reader-writer affair of "intersubjective communication," the text "transcends its own psycho-social conditions of production and thereby opens itself up to an unlimited series of readings" (1981, p. 139). Through fiction and poetry, Ricoeur says, new possibilities of being in the world are opened up within everyday reality. "Fiction and poetry *intend* being, not under the modality of being given, but under the modality of the power to be" (1981, p. 142).

Ricoeur sees literature reaching far past the didactic, descriptive language of the everyday to touch on the level designated by Husserlian *Lebenswelt* (lifeworld) and Heideggerian *Dasein* (Being-in-the-World). To Ricoeur (1981) the referential dimension of literature raises the most fundamental hermeneutical problem:

> If we can no longer define hermeneutics in terms of the search for the psychological intentions of another person which are concealed *behind* the text, and if we do not want to reduce

> interpretation to the dismantling of structure, then what shall be interpreted? I shall say, "to interpret is to explicate the type of being-in-the-world unfolded *in front of* the text." (p. 141)

Accordingly, he says we only understand ourselves "by the long detour of the signs of humanity deposited in cultural works," through language, articulated by literature (1981, p. 140). This meaning is found in what Ricoeur calls "the world of the work" and it is not "behind the text, as a hidden intention would be, but in front of it, as that which the work unfolds, discovers, reveals; to understand is to understand oneself in front of the text" (1981, p. 143). Ricoeur points to a space between the reader and the text where meaning unfolds. It is a dynamic, vital space in which life seeks expression; it is a space of disclosure, of new meanings, of new forms and it is embodied, an interacting in the life process. This is the space at the centre of reader-response literary theory.

Chapter 6: Literature and the Ecology of Reader Response

Reader-response literary theory takes as its central premise the relationship between reader and literary text as it unfolds into an imaginative engagement. It is out of the dynamism of the meeting place of the child and the text that may arise the possibilities to generate certain pools of experience, knowledge and feeling. In the relational space of the text, "the reader's world becomes re-woven, and it is this re-weaving of the reader's self that alters the reader's interactions with the world. It is an infinite chain of significance" (Sumara,1994, p. 49). Rosenblatt (1938) introduced the term *transaction* to describe the reader-text relationship. The term is generative, inclusive and emerges out of Rosenblatt's idea of *mutualism,* the reader and the text act on each other, "each affecting and conditioning the other" (Karolides, 2000, p. 5).

> Through the medium of words, the text brings into the reader's consciousness certain concepts, certain sensuous experiences, certain images of things, people, actions, scenes. The special meanings, and more particularly, the submerged associations that the words and the images have for the individual reader will largely determine what the work communicates… The reader brings to the work personality traits, memories of past events, present needs… and a particular physical condition. These and many other elements in a never-to-be-duplicated combination enter into

the reader's relationship with the text. (Rosenblatt 1978, pp. 30, 31)

Rosenblatt's theory, formulated in the 1920s and 30s, is considered today to have been far ahead of its time (Clifford, 1990), as it indicates a vital, dynamic relationship between reader and text.

Other reader response theorists influenced by a variety of critical schools of thought often privilege reader or text in the act of reading. Wolfgang Iser (1978; 1989) also acknowledges the experience of reading as a merging of reader and text, "as text and reader thus merge into a single situation, the division between subject and object no longer applies" (1978, p. 5). However, Iser is more concerned with hypothetical or implied readers, "whose moves are charted out by (and hence more or less controlled by) the text" (Rabinowitz, 1997, p. 1). Iser pays attention to the indeterminacies in the texts and to the gaps the reader has to fill in on his or her own. For Iser the reader remains very much under the control of the text (Rabinowitz, 1997).

There are reader response theorists who focus on the psychoanalytic context of the reader (Holland, 1975), the historical context of the reader (Jauss, 1982; Tompkins, 1980), on the reader's subjectivity as being paramount (Bleich, 1978), or on the textual features and their effects on readers' activities (Iser, 1989). Richard Beach (1993) imposes some structure to the loose collection of critics who may be considered to fall under the name "reader response." Beach outlines five theoretical perspectives on response according to how a theorist falls within one of the five primary theoretical orientations; the *textual, psychological*, *social*, *cultural* and *experiential*. According to Beach, *textual* theorists focus on how readers use their knowledge of text or genre conventions to respond to specific features of the text. For example, readers of the horror genre apply their knowledge from previous encounters with the genre to predict story outcomes. *Psychological* theorists are interested in readers' cognitive or subconscious processes and how these processes vary according to both unique individual personality and the readers' level of emotional and cognitive development. *Social* theorists are concerned with the influence of the social context on the space of the reader/text transaction. Such theorists would be interested in the contextual milieu and how it serves to shape meaning. These theorists might explore how a book club, reading circle or on-line chat group could serve to encourage and elicit response in a community of readers. *Cultural* theorists, similarly, explore how cultural roles, attitudes, values, as well as larger cultural, historical contexts shape reader response. The response of readers to texts that reflect ethnocultural perspectives is the concern of the cultural theorist. Finally, *experiential* theorists focus on the phenomenal nature of readers' engagement or experience with texts. Such theorists are particularly interested in the ways readers identify with characters, visualize images, or construct the world of the text. While categories and delineations such as Beach's provide convenience, they are always limited by the fact that any one theorist will most often represent a range of different perspectives, and assigning a theorist to any identifiable theoretical perspective is open to the criticism of being arbitrary or limiting.

I position my interests and this inquiry within the scope of 'experiential' theories of reader response. It is my hope to elaborate on the work of theorists who concern themselves with the experience of literary engagement. At the center of this study is a primary interest in describing readers' experience of engagement with bioregional poetry and their involvement in what Langer (1992) has called their own "envisionments."

Rosenblatt's theory of the transactive space is central to experiential theories that are primarily interested in describing specific processes of a reader's experience. Her theory has led to the delineation of specific response processes including:

> i) engaging: becoming emotionally involved, empathizing or identifying with a text.
>
> ii) constructing: entering into and creating alternate worlds
>
> iii) imaging: creating visual images
>
> iv) connecting: relating one's autobiographical experience to the text
>
> v) evaluating/reflecting: judging the quality of one's experience with a text. (Beach, 1993, p. 52)

Still other theorists have elaborated the notion of "transaction" picking up Rosenblatt's strands and weaving them still further. Sumara (1994; 2000; 2002) puts forward the idea of a complex, evolutionary, intertextual relationality of reader and text as represented by a "commonplace location" (2000, p. 33). This commonplace location does not exist "in" the reader, or "in" the text, but in the swirl and array of experiences, associations, and memories that arise before, during and after the interpretative activity. Sumara posits that engaging with literary texts can be considered a focal practice out of which may emerge deep meaning and personal insight. Engagement with texts results in "associational complexities" (Sumara, 2002, xv) that when attended to create transformative opportunities to re-create, re-imagine and re-interpret human identity.

Inquiring further into the transactive space and the experience of literary engagement Sumara draws on recent research in cognitive science and evolutionary biology. The experience of engagement is viewed through a recognition that human perception is inextricably linked to both body and mind. Sumara's theory is firmly grounded in the entwining of the human body "in other bodies; the social, the cultural, the epistemic" (Sumara, 2002, p. 137). In attempting to understand the implications of the science of human perception on the transactive space between reader and text, Sumara probes deeply into the potential of texts or "literary places" to interrupt the everyday, the mundane, the familiar. Our everyday lives, our daily experiences are most often rendered invisible, precluding the learning of anything new from what is often closest to us. The space of literary engagement can serve to "de-familiarize" the familiar. The Russian critic Victor Shklovsky wrote of Tolstoy's novels as having just this ability to interrupt the everyday, the "invisible";

> After being perceived several times, objects acquire the status of 'recognition.' An object appears before us. We know it's there but we do not see it, and, for that reason, we can know nothing about it… The achievement of art is the transformation of the object, describing it as though for the first time, communicating its particularities… The purpose of the image is not to draw our understanding closer to what the image stands for , but rather to allow us to perceive the object in a special way, in short, to lead us to a 'vision' of this object rather than mere 'recognition.' (in Masturzo, 2000, p. 132)

How is it possible for literary engagement to allow us to see uniquely, to challenge us in a process of *estrangement*? In attempting to create activities to nurture in children the embodied space of literary engagement, I developed practices that allowed for the emergence of "associational complexity." These practices were meant to challenge the familiar and the everyday. The "nature free write" activity, the writers notebooks, the writing with felt-sense, the composing in the "writing spot," the attending to artefacts, and the responding to the words of bioregional poets all cleared spaces for the children and encouraged processes by which their embodied practices of reading and writing generated fresh and complicated images and insights to create encounters that would go beyond mere recognition.

It is in the lived, embodied dimension of reader response theory that I am most interested and on which, in this study, I will try to elaborate. It is *in* the transactive character of our relationship with a literary text, through the perceiving, emotional, imaginative, thinking, dreaming and embodied encounter that we experience, invent and discover the meanings by which we grow and make sense of the world in which we find ourselves "set down." In the trans(act)ion there is an embodied, participatory engagement – contact; ex-change, meeting, transmission, a fusion across difference, an encounter; a relational, interactive understanding that potentially disrupts, interrupts the belief system of the culture allowing a more authentic self-understanding to arise. The transaction is the experiencing *in* the interaction, the inward sentience, as an internal relationship between symbols and feelings. It is our *being* potentially changed by the transaction with the different space of the text. In the science of ecology the term "ecotone" is used to describe a place where landscapes meet – a field with a forest, the ocean with the land. It is a place of great richness and diversity with a wealth of unique life forms existing as a result of the commingling of communities. It a place where contact yields change. It is as in an intertidal zone where the land and sea merge and meld to create unique life; a fusion-across-difference that is never the same in the ebb and flow of endless flux. So, too, I propose is the space between reader and text and what happens when we live there. Sumara (1994) believes that reading does not only change the way we think and act,

> it affects, in every way, *who we are*. And if reading affects who we are, it necessarily affects what we *know* and what we do. We could say then, that the experience of reading has not only altered us *phenomenologically*, it has altered us *biologically*. (p. 66)

There is a commitment in Sumara's words that meaning is grounded in the life process. The idea of "embodied realism" (Lakoff & Johnson, 1999), or an "intelligent body" (Fisher, 2002), the "felt sense" (Gendlin, 1992), and the "situational body" (Gendlin, 1997) all point to a precisely attuned intentional relationship with the world as we experience it from "within." It is this belief that has particular bearing on the notion of *ecological sensibility* - that we feel in our bodies what is for or against the life process. The search for meaning, overcoming alienation from the living Earth is a hermeneutic effort, but it is also a retrieval of our embodiment. The goal of this inquiry is to better understand literary engagement as nested in a larger web of relations that includes both the cognitive, the biological, even the spiritual. At this point in the study, it is important to consider how reading and writing may be placed within a broader process of a bodily living-in-the-world that includes language and participatory engagement.

The phenomenology of literary engagement

How is literature an *experiencing* in the transactive space of literary engagement? How is it lived and felt? What is the nature of the internal relationship between feelings and symbols? What is the significance of literature, of literary engagement in the nurturing of ecological sensibility, in affecting heightened consciousness and an intensified cognitive and emotional experience? These are important questions for this study and a phenomenological dialogue can help us to know differently current theoretical treatments of reader response and move toward a deeper understanding of the lived significance of literary engagement.

Rosenblatt's transactive space is a meeting of the reader and the text; the text brings concepts, images, characters, scenes, emotions and feelings to the reader's consciousness. The reader brings to the text a unique personal history and personality. "These and many other elements in a never-to-be-duplicated combination enter into the reader's relationship with the text" (Rosenblatt, 1995, p. 37). Rosenblatt is aware of the "sensuous experiences" or bodily situatedness inherent in reading and response, however it is separated out from the conceptual or emotional. "The reading of any work of literature is of necessity, an individual and unique occurrence involving the mind and emotions of some particular reader" (Rosenblatt, 1995, p. 32). With these words Rosenblatt seems to bind the experience of the reader and text in the subject/object dichotomy, the mind/body split.

> Because the literary work is organized and self-contained, it concentrates our attention and regulates what will enter our consciousness. Out of this arises a sense of an organized structure of *perception and feelings* which constitutes the esthetic experience" (emphasis added, Rosenblatt, 1995, p. 40).

Is it possible to inquire phenomenologically into the experience of the transactive space, into the lived meaning of literary engagement and the "esthetic experience?" In doing so, we must reflect deeply on the fact that we are biological, embodied beings. As such we are always already attuned to Being. (Levin, 1985). This embodiment informs our perceptiveness and responsiveness to the world. How might it be possible to elaborate on this "structure of perception and feelings" that , according to Rosenblatt, characterizes the engagement with the literary text?

Gendlin's (1997) philosophy attempts to move beyond perception as a starting point, asserting that it is an ancient but incorrect taken-for-grantedness that experience starts with perception.

> Perception is never first, and never alone. It is not the way we are in our situations. Perception divides your perception of me from mine of you. But interaction is more than two perceptions. And interaction is not inherently divided… We will move beyond the subject/object distinction if we become able to speak from how we interact bodily in our situations. (1997, p. 15)

Gendlin's philosophy phenomenologically describes our bodily sense of living in our situations and provides a language and a way of thinking from the implicit felt-sense inherent in our bodily living-in situations. Gendlin's theory and the language used to describe that theory has implications for many fields. For example, it challenges us to think more creatively and in a fresh way about experiential theories of reader response. It promises to open new concepts and insights while deepening our understanding of literary engagement, of how literature "works" as a powerful relational, interactive agent of change in our daily lives.

When Katie, in her Grade 9 Language Arts class, for instance, responds to the poem as an invocation of her relationship with her grandfather there is a strong sense of the Gadamerian "fusion of horizons." At that moment, in that unique situation, Katie is part of the history of the text; she belongs to the poem, and the poem to her. Her response, as Gendlin uses the phrase, "carries forward" an insight, a connection, something new that has never been said before. It is in this sense that literary engagement is at its most profound – in carrying our lives forward in meaningful ways. It is "a coming to understanding." (Gadamer, 1997, p. 446) On this Gadamer writes;

> This is not to be understood as if it were the purpose of language. Coming to understanding is not mere action, a purposeful activity, a setting up of signs through which I will transmit my will to others. Coming to understanding as such, rather, does not need any tools, in the proper sense of the word. It is a life process in which a community of life is lived out. (1997, p. 446)

The “life process” referred to by Gadamer includes the “sensuous experiences,” the “physical condition,” “the special kind of intense and ordered experience” alluded to by Rosenblatt and other experiential reader response theorists, but never fully described phenomenologically. Gendlin’s philosophy helps us think about the nature of the transactive space phenomenologically. His philosophy seeks a way to think about, with the bodily carrying forward, the “felt meaning” of the body, that which has been hidden, or concealed, by conceptual thought. Gendlin’s sensitive phenomenological attention to the “mesh” among body, situation and language may provide a fresh and deeply meaningful account of how literature “works,” something that is implicitly present in experiential reader response theory, but not clearly explicated. His writing opens up an understanding of how the dynamic, living space between reader and text can carry our lives forward in a process of change and continuity, affecting in every sense who we are. For the purposes of this study, it provides a clear and compelling means to think about the creative and generative power of literature to nurture ecological sensibility. Understanding this power requires careful analysis.

Literary engagement and implicit intricacy

Rosenblatt sees the literary text as concentrating our attention and regulating what will enter our consciousness. The text imposes concepts, images, characters and these work with and in “the submerged associations”, “the personality traits,” “memories of past events,” “present needs and preoccupations,” “a particular mood of the moment and a particular physical condition” (1995, p. 37) of the reader. According to Rosenblatt, “Just as the personality and concerns of the reader are largely socially acquired and socially patterned, so the literary work, like language itself, is the result of the fact that man is a social being" (1995, p. 34). The idea that social patterns are an order imposed upon humans who are solely molded and made malleable by this imposition is a premise that Gendlin's philosophy sets out to challenge.

Gendlin posits that patterns, concepts, rules, and forms never work alone, but always within a wider more intricate order. Forms and social patterns are incapable of encompassing the intricacy of people and situations. In his thinking, this more intricate order includes social patterns. While the patterns and rules are always at work, they are at work *within* a wider, more intricate, bodily experiencing. Rules and social patterns function within a "wider saying."

> Western philosophy… by overstating the role of forms … quite lost what is more than form. Everything is taken as ordered by imposed forms, patterns, rules. Most modern philosophers have utterly lost an order of nature, the person, the practice, the body. They deny that anything could have an order of its own. All order is assumed to be entirely imposed by a history, a culture, or a conceptual interpretation… But what is this imposed order imposed upon? (Gendlin, 1991, pp. 24, 25)

Gendlin attempts to use language to describe the "more" than patterns, to elucidate what the intricacy of bodily-felt meaning can bring to theoretical thinking. He is not making an appeal for some "pure" realm of experiencing unaffected by specific social practices and cultural forms. While acknowledging that social patterns, rules, forms do function even in our deepest and seemingly most private experience, he reminds us that these concepts, social forms, cultural expectations fall short of guiding what we do. These patterns do not work in a one-way determination; something "talks back." Everyday we must improvise and create more intricate ways to act in many situations making these situations more intricate than identifiable concepts or patterns.

Experiential reader response theories may be elaborated by being read with a deeper sense of the intricacy of the "more than forms." What is imposed by the text functions in and with our deepest, pre-reflective experience. When I read a poem, the words, the structure, the images, the author's skill are at work ordering my experience. But there is something else at work – something implicit in the situation. It is an implying that is at once "vague and more precise" (Gendlin, 1991, p. 56) – a felt-sense. I have a sense what the poem is saying to me. But how does it say? I re-read the words, the lines, pause at certain phrases; there is a vague sense, something is there; yet the words won't come that will allow me to say it. I re-read; a line is puzzling, confusing; ideas arise, thoughts come. I reject these until the right fit is found. The implying demands, wants, and, as Gendlin says, is "vague yet more precise" in its calling forth.

I know I cannot just attribute any meaning to the poem. I may "try on" different possibilities. But how do I know when I have the possibility that is right? When it is accepted there is a sense, a felt-sense and a change occurs. The implying, the demanding, no longer implies or demands in the same way, but is "carried forward." The change has been described by Gendlin as becoming 'unstuck'; the felt-sense carries life forward possibly into a deeper intricacy always leading further into itself.

Perhaps the poem, line, or word poses no puzzlement or confusion. I read, understand or simply dismiss any feeling or implying that may arise. Much of what I read during the day is this type of experience. It is straight-forward, boring, irrelevant, or read for information purposes. Most often it passes right by. But sometimes what I read unsettles, provokes, results in a gnawing, grasping, a vague, indefinable sense that I can choose to stay with, inquire into, or dismiss. However, Gendlin reminds us "a feeling is never there for nothing… a feeling is an interaction in some situation… it is a body-sense that is unclear in form but implicitly more precise than emotions" (Gendlin, 1997, p. 15). This body-sense adds intricacy to Rosenblatt's "structure of perception and feelings which constitutes for us the esthetic experience." Gendlin reminds us that it is an old and false assumption that experience begins with perception. "Perception is never first, never alone." It is not the primary way we are in our situations; we exist in terms of living and interacting. I sense my situation – my whole situation – and perception is part of a wider body-environment interaction. To illustrate this idea, Gendlin uses the example of seeing a person in the street, but you don't remember who it is. The person gives you a familiar feeling. You know that you know but the person's identity escapes you. You know by the gnawing feeling in your body. "That gnawing feeling does know. Your body knows who it is" (1997, p. 16). That knowing is the implying, the felt-sense, a whole sense in your body. The body sense and the situation are not two separate things. We are in the situation; the situation is in us. Concepts, patterns are implicit in the situation that is always already more than any number of details.

If we read "text" in place of Gendlin's "situation" we may be led into a deeper sense of the experience of literary engagement. Texts are indeed "situations," not existing without readers who come to them; as Borgmann said, “a text by itself is helpless.” Our body-sense happens in, is part of, makes and re-makes the text. Body-sense and text carry each other forward. If we are willing to stay with the feeling, the body-sense, for it is never present before us, rather it requires us to “go into a murky sort of down and in” (Gendlin, 1997, p. 16) perhaps something new can come from the body-sense. How can this description provide more to the transactive space of reader-response theory as it contributes the bodily-implying in and of that space? The feeling arising out of this space and so often referred to by Rosenblatt and other experiential reader response theorists is now fleshed out, so to speak. It is a felt-sense, the murky implying that is located spatially in the center of the body. This uneasiness, warmth, fluttery, or jumpy sense or quality “is not subjective, not just internal, not private, it is the implicit situation” (1991, p. 82). The body has the situation implicit in it. We can access the felt-sense to inquire into it by quieting the conceptual mind.

The text demands, wants something, some sense, implying feelings that carry forward in the same direction. Possibilities arise, images, memories, connections, narratives, and thoughts move the sense forward, but not forward in a spatial direction. All my previous connections, possibilities, images that come out of the text are like steps that are not wrong, or incorrect, even as they are rejected by the strength of the implying. This is not to be understood as a linear or logical progression toward the “right” answer. The word “right” comes to mean something else. The steps, however, are life forwarding - forwarding in the direction of the implying. The implying evoked by the poem wants, demands, and I just cannot *will* a meaning; it must come, emerge, follow out of the progression and “make sense.” When this happens I know it; I feel it; I become "unstuck" in some way. The poem, line, or phrase seems true in some way and there is a relief, an excitement, as meaning is carried forward. Of course this is not to say that the "change" will always come and that we will become unstuck. The implying is very precise and I may choose the next step and therefore go wrong or I can dismiss the implying altogether.

Texts as situations

When we speak of *interpreting* stories, *analyzing* poems, *finding* meaning and themes in plays or essays, our language may be concealing the intricate, embodied nature of the reader-text relationship. The matrix present in the relationship between the text, the reader and language can say something about how a response is evoked, how words come. A short story, for instance, is more than a series of words, sentences, paragraphs, details, or narrative techniques. When we read we enter the story on the level of general impression. The story happens, when we are involved, in much the same way as any situation happens. Our situations are far more intricately ordered than our conceptual patterns, or even as given to us by our five senses. When reading we may be aware of literary techniques and devices, but our experiencing is always much more. In the moment as I read I am taken up in the story, in a general impression. Later, I may reflect on the many different details. But these 'many details' were implicit in the impression before they were noticed.

Gendlin (1991) calls this a pre-separated multiplicity. Each situation is not one or many different details and most are never separate. They function implicitly – "pre-separatedly." I can reflect later to separate them out – but each detail, image, phrase, action can specify itself further and further. The most minute detail can evoke a further implying – a felt-sense that can carry forward into meaning, insight, into something new. Each little detail is a pre-separated multiplicity also.

The felt-sense, an implicitly intricate body-sense functions in every situation in a highly ordered way. In everything we do we are always bodily aware; there is an implicit sense of the whole intricacy of each situation. We can physically sense our body's implying the situation. "And we can make the transition from the unreflected to the reflected body-sense anytime" (Gendlin, 1991, p. 90). We can focus on this body-sense, stay with its implying to move toward a deeper self-understanding. This attunement can be taught as a means of contact and to feel in a body-sensible way the gift of our embodiment (Gendlin, 1981; Perl, 2004). When we focus on our own body of experience, it never leaves us unchanged. We reflect on this experience, this body-sense, as it is lived and felt and it moves our lives forward within the organic, self-ordering wisdom of the body.

When reading I am struck or touched in some way by a word, image or detail and stop to re-read, or ponder. My eyes come up from the page to stare out the window; they look without seeing. The stopping, the staring in space, implies what will happen. The felt-sense adjudicates my response to it. But to reiterate, this is not a sequence of steps to be followed, a logical progression, for each possibility that enters into my pondering potentially re-makes the "possibility system." My stopping is a demanding, but not an indeterminate one, because there is a precision or "truth" which must be met if I am to carry forward and meet the implying. I deliberate, further possibilities can be implied; I can stay with the implying or move on – and I can go wrong. But I can't "give" meaning, or simply add interpretation as if the text is mere Silly Putty out of which I can mold or stamp on whatever meaning I like. The implied intricacy of the text is "crossed" with the implied intricacy of my felt sense to create a demanding truth that can carry forward.

The transactive space of reader response may be seen as truly "mutualistic," as Rosenblatt suggested, when the processes of engagement and involvement are inclusive of the responsive order – a deepening sense of our biological nature as truly embodied beings.

Language comes in the body

It is important to see that this "crossed" sense-making occurs implicitly. As I read the poem many possibilities are implied, but their implying is also "the focal" implying of the next one. In life we do not usually stop to select from possibilities- we act, we do, we "decide" rather seamlessly or pre-reflectively. This is what Gendlin calls "focaled steps" (1991, p.101). He uses the example of a common situation- smiling or saying hello to a passerby in the hallway. Without thinking, the tone of the hello and the nuanced quality of the smile is focaled from our history and recent interaction with that person. The focaled step forms out of the crossing – out of the implicit intricacy of the situation that the body knows. As the example illustrates most often the next step just comes and we are saying or doing it before we are even aware – we just "say" or "do."

But sometimes no next step comes. There may be confusion, puzzlement - a felt-sense forms out of the confusion. "The coming of a felt-sense is a large change from the confused condition. We feel relief. Now in a way we know what to do, but the words and actions have not actually formed yet" (Gendlin, 1991, p. 101). The felt-sense is a step, a crossing, a making sense; a decision comes. Having to decide means we don't know. We pay attention to the felt-sense and that will "imply further doable steps." Gendlin warns that focaling can miss much and does not include all considerations of everything relevant.

When something we think, hear, or read makes sense, this sense-making is a fresh focaling that carries forward the implicit intricacy of the whole context. We cannot will something to make sense. The focaling has to come. It is in this coming that lies the bodily character of language, action, thought and images. They are not separated dimensions. All are "crossed" in the making of one next implied speech, action, thought or image. This is why Gendlin asserts we cannot begin with perception, but we must move away from the subject/object approach that comes from perception. He says, "Perception always divides what is seemingly over there from a perceiver here. Perception is never first and never alone. It is not the main way we are in situation" (Gendlin, 1991, p. 105). Gendlin encourages us to move beyond the subject/object distinction by becoming able to speak from how we interact bodily in situations. His attention to experiential detail is the greatest strength of his work. It is this attention to experiential detail that provides a language by which we may describe phenomenologically the intricacy of the transactive space that is at the center of experiential reader response theory. Gendlin provides us with a language for how, ostensibly, the literary text "works." His theory and practice of language speaks to and can be applied to literary engagement and how it can be placed within a participative, bodily engagement. Gendlin's philosophy promises to deepen our phenomenological understanding of the nurturing in children of ecological sensibility by bringing this understanding to bear on the process of literary engagement and by focusing our attention on the living responsiveness of the intelligent body precisely attuned for relationship with the world. Gendlin's work has profound implications for helping children experience their natural "intertwining" (Levin, 1982, p. 293), a deeply sensed interdependency and kinship with a larger living field that they can find within themselves. It promises to contribute to a revitalized understanding of experiential theories of reader response as it grounds language in the body and moves us toward a deeper sense of a "living literacy"- one that is embodied and honours our inherent need for relationship and belonging; one that is implicitly life-affirming.

And so I return, a last time, to Katie whom we met in Chapter 2, sitting by the window in the grade 9 language arts classroom. Outside the late November light hardens as the wind and tides obey the pull and tilt of the planet in an eternal rhythmic turn of the season, cycling as nearly every system does, from the human body to a galactic cluster.

> Today her body deepened
> As she picked a late flower
> And behind her
> The dust rose on the backroad
> Like a remembrance of her life.

The words, contained in Allan Cooper's poem call up, lift out, a memory, an association, a felt-sense. "I can't help thinking that my grandfather belongs to the sea and the sea to him," the girl writes. She describes her grandfather's hands as being "eroded like the cliffs" and "old like the driftwood." Does her language reveal a permeability of boundaries, a breaking down of perceived separateness, an identification with the greater rhythms of life? Her grandfather (and, presumably, she too) emerges as part of a greater community, a common ground or kinship. There is also a challenge in her words to a

Sartrean existential isolation that becomes an unreality when we realize ourselves a part of larger life forces, when we discover the subtle organizing patterns of the universe and move toward a resonant relationship with them. The young writer chooses the image of her grandfather "turning the crinkled thin pages of his worn black Bible." Could this be a sense of her grandfather's life as an infusion into greater life processes that confront death? Katie's short piece is imbued with a completeness, a *spirituality* that touches on, and in some way, brings to the fore the interplay between birth and death in the larger stream of life. Her words point to the education of sensibility, which is ultimately a deeply spiritual awareness – an awareness that is at the heart of this study.

It could be argued that the girl's response is not *about* the poem at all. There is no analysis of metaphor or personification in her response, or word choice, repetition, poetic style, form or structure. The response does reflect, however, the "lived–through" experience and the richness of the space between the young reader and the text as it emerges in the moment. Iser (1978) says of this experience, "The significance of the work, then, does not lie in the meaning sealed within the text, but in the fact that meaning brings out what had been previously sealed within us" (p. 157). The poem is generative; it serves to nurture and encourage understandings that lay within the student as she wrote "from" (Probst, 2000) the poem to call forth personal memories, associations, anecdotes and meanings. When the teacher reads the lines from the second poem by John S. Mitchell, he is allowing for the voices of other presences, for a sentient landscape to emerge into a growing field of significant relations.

> boats upside down
> on red wharf

cliffs surround and close
centuries of eyes
in each eye
whispers and whispers
in me

Katie responds with the beginnings of a beautiful piece of writing that nests her grandfather in an intimate interconnection with the life force of the ocean. Jardine (2000) uses the term *ecopedagogy* to describe what seems to be unfolding in this classroom experience;

> Ecopedagogy assumes that there is always and already a deep ambiguous kinship at work between the real, earthly life of children, the tasks of pedagogy… (including how we envisage and practice the relation between the young and the old, our conceptions and embodiments of knowledge and our images of ourselves as teachers)… to the extent that the task of pedagogy is to usher children into those understandings of the Earth's ways required for life to go on in a full and healthy and wholesome and sustainable way, it (pedagogy) is already intimately ecological at its heart. (2000, p. 48)

The space of contact, of experience, between child, teacher and text is one of mediation, a place of exchange, a flow-through of the voices of the young and the old. The poet Gary Snyder (1990) writes, "In this huge old occidental culture our teaching elders are books. *Books are our grandparents*" (p. 61). Rachel Carson (1964), the pre-eminent marine biologist, who ushered in our contemporary environmental movement with the publication of her book *Silent Spring* in 1962, wrote in a short essay *The Sense of Wonder* (1964) of the pedagogical significance of the adult in the life of a child.

> If a child is to keep alive his inborn sense of wonder he needs the companionship of at least one adult who can share it, re-discovering with him the joy, excitement, and mystery of the world we live in. (p. 7)

Perhaps, then, it is perfectly fitting that the young girl chose to respond to the poem by writing about her grandfather. It is a response that speaks to the intergenerational dynamic that renews the life process. It helps the child focus on what she has always already "known" and in its coming it is bound to carry the child's life forward, bound to educe and bound to eventuate a deeper self-understanding. The words of the writers who give voice to the essential fullness of life and landscape may serve as models, as "voices of appreciation" (Chawla, 1999; 2002), for such voices, in turn, are dependent for their fruition on the life-giving, life-force of the child. Jardine (2000) says of these same interdependencies:

> without the deep rooting soils that age and time and wisdom and discipline provide, the beautiful voice of the individual child… can end up merely puerile… the young and old are dependents, kin, relations/related, and only in these relations does each avoid its weakest aspect (senility/puerility). Each finds comfort (common fortitude, strength) in the other. (p. 51)

So it is with the teacher, who tends the space carefully, introducing literature that conserves (Bowers, 2003; Jardine, 2000) a wisdom for how we might live on this Earth—literature that is inclusive of other voices. The teacher nurtures a space that allows opportunities for students to respond; the teacher creates a community in which young people experience deeply, and in their response re-create, re-vision, and re-new a sensibility, an ecological sensibility, for what it is to dwell rightly on this Earth at this time.

Chapter 7: Bioregionalism and the Poietic Process

Knotting place, body and mind

This research project was designed to address the possibility for deepening the relationship between the reader and the literary text, specifically, poetry of the bioregion. What meaning may emerge out of the linguistic coupling of reader, place and poem? How can we understand language as a means to foster relationship with the living world? The selection of the poetry and the writing practices to engage students in the deepening of their ecological sensibility is based on a belief that we are, as language-ing beings, coupled to our environment through the creative performance and vigour of our imagination. Simone Weil (1987) describes the imagination as, "a knot of action and reaction that attaches us to the world" (p. 50). In Chapter 5, I discussed Gendlin's philosophy and how it helps us to better understand the transactive space in reader response literary theory. Gendlin's theory of embodiment and felt-sense describes phenomenally the dynamic 'knots' of imagination, text and body that helps us think about how literature 'works.' It is this creative process of poetry and metaphor that is a poietic process linking our thoughts with the world outside. Anne Primavesi (2002) describes this poietic process this way:

> By 'metaphorizing' unicorns and utopias into existence, our thoughts, imaginations and emotions take us beyond the actual, over the boundary line between possible and impossible which cannot be rationalized… Most importantly, 'metaphorizing' can inspire us, in our

> behaviour, to confirm or contest the present situation. (p. 62)

The text, the poem, demands something, implies feelings linked to possibilities, images, memories, connections that move our lives forward. Martha Nussbaum (1995) in her book *Poetic Justice* argues that literary engagement, through the imagination, affords the reader the opportunity to "put themselves in the place of people of many different kinds and to take on their experiences. In their [literary works] very mode of address to the imagined reader, they convey the sense that there are links of possibility, at least on a very general level, between the character and the reader" (p. 5). This metaphoric interaction Nussbaum defines as being able to "imagine non-existence possibilities; to see one thing as another and one thing in another; to endow a perceived form with a complex life" (1995, pp. 7 –12).

In what way might the poietic process involve students more deeply in the life of their place? How might the poietic nurture a richer sense of what it means to "in-habit" or "live in place?" How might poetry enable children to imagine these "non-existent possibilities" as they pertain to the life of the bioregion in which they are irrevocably embedded? Understanding the relational and lived dimension contained in the idea of the *bioregion* is important before moving forward.

Poiesis and living-in-place - Interpreting bioregionalism

The idea of "living in place" led to the coining of the term *bioregionalism* in 1972 by Peter Berg, an ecologist. The idea was to "re-inhabit" local places, "by becoming native to place through becoming aware of the particular ecological relationships that operate within and around it" (in Berthold-Bond, 2000, p.6). Daniel Berthold-Bond

(2000) suggests that a definition of bioregionalism is contested because the very idea of a *region* in which we 'live-in-place' is an elusive concept. According to Berthold-Bond this contestation in no way detracts from the philosophy of bioregionalism, but is one of its greatest merits as it gives greater 'specificity' to the 'space' of nature: "it subverts the mathematical, topographical, literalist definition of place as objective geographic location ... and develops a new geography of place as experiential, subjective and meaning laden" (Berthold-Bond, 2000, p.7). It is just this phenomenal, experiential and lived dimension of the bioregion that offers an opportunity to develop a more complex, subtle picture of the interrelationship between humans and the places they inhabit. The concern is not with the way scientists and geographers parcel out land in manageable pieces, although this is where the contentiousness surrounding bioregionalism resides.

This geographical categorizing, however, is not the point. I know, through my direct lived experience, that I reside on the coast of the North Atlantic. The exact geographical demarcation is not that important. But I imagine people who live on the other coasts of Newfoundland and Labrador, on the green hills of Prince Edward Island, along the spruce-lined shores of Nova Scotia and New Brunswick all the way down Maine's rocky coastline to Cape Ann, and Buzzard's Bay to Rhode Island know it too. They may not know to which of the three geographically distinct zones they belong, as determined by ocean current and water temperature, but they may sense, in a very different way, an embeddedness, a tacit, implicit awareness that their lives are part of a vast web of perceptions and sensations, of a tidal inherency that makes up a living, breathing landscape. And this is the sense of place and region as intended by bioregionalism. It lends itself more to a phenomenological geography that emphasizes, as Edward Relph (1976) does, the notion that, "[places] are constructed of our memories and affections through repeated encounters and complex associations" (p. 26). The ocean affects the architecture, the pattern of settlement, and the place names of the communities. It looms large in the history, the folklore, the music, poetry and art. Even more importantly, it stands as a living entity in an ecosystem dependent on a participatory reciprocity. We live with and depend on the myriad others of the bioregion as they do on us. Hence, Berthold –Bond (2000) believes that a *region* is " an intrinsically *relational structure:* it comes into being as a response of inhabitants to the landscape in which they dwell" (my emphasis, p.17).

It is for these reasons that eco-theologian Thomas Berry (1999) has taken up the theory of bioregionalism as a way into a greater intimacy with the larger Earth community. He writes in *The Great Work: Our Way into the Future:*

> humans in the natural order of things belong to, are possessed by, and are subject to the geographical place in which they reside. Yet through technological skills humans have become less dependent on their immediate geographic region. We have come to consider that we become more human the more extensively we withdraw from any dependency on our bioregion… There is little or no relation to the fields that grow our food, to the streams that provide our water, to the woodlands that surround us, or to the regional flora and fauna. (pp. 93, 94)

The challenge is to activate and re-activate an attunement and awareness for the bioregions in which we dwell. The regions, the places to which we belong are comprised of interacting life systems. Is it possible to grasp the sense of interdependence, of participatory reciprocity, that goes beyond yet is inclusive of acquiring knowledge about it? "To learn interdependence requires a new consciousness, a developmental transformation; we must re-inhabit what we know and live it in our very being" (Parks - Daloz, p. 31). In rural communities, this means deepening a relationship with the biotic community. However, to those belonging to urban areas issues of environmental justice may seem more relevant than acquiring ecological knowledge about the land, geography, flora and fauna of their bioregion. Nurturing in urban children, who often live in homogenized and utilitarian landscapes that are ecologically and aesthetically impoverished, a deeper sense of their connection to the life of their bioregion through literature and language is a research area that demands inquiry.

In interpreting the theory of bioregionalism it must be made clear that attention and attunement to the bioregion, as a mode of experiencing more deeply the surroundings, is a form of education that is inherently "place-conscious." Place consciousness does not necessarily include a narrow, parochial, or solipsistic view. Guided by, and deeply committed to, ecological principles of enmeshment and interdependence, bioregionalism points to the necessity to expand our relationships with/in the natural world from an inter and trans-disciplinary basis. A bioregional focus is inclusive of cultural, historical, social considerations by beginning in the local place and extending outward by design into wider communities.

This study was undertaken with individual children living in coastal Newfoundland and Labrador whose lives are largely defined by circumstances of history and culture. The children are shaped and (in)formed as members of a bioregion connected to continental and world ecology. Asking similar questions as does this study of inner city children, immigrant children and newcomers to a particular bioregion would be a valuable line of inquiry and an area for further study. Exploring multicultural voices in literary texts particular to a bioregion, identifying international writers who take up the interdependence of the human and the natural world, or studying the response of children to these writers are lines of inquiry that have yet to be pursued.

These paths of inquiry would indeed broaden and deepen our understanding of what it truly means to live within a place. Those places may be urban, rural, inner city, remote, or isolated; the human communities may reflect a common language, history and culture or be a meld of cosmopolitanism and ethnocultural diversity. Bioregionalism focuses on the necessary relations, cultural and natural that shape a given place and its human communities. When we become attuned to our place, our neighbourhood, the local, its issues, history, biology, literature, and art we are always already pointing away from ourselves, to imagine and know the world as intradependent, filled with a variety of locally intradependent places. In this sense bioregionalism leads out by adding substance and depth to that which is closest and allows for an increasingly complex understanding of the world and the place of the local community within that world.

Brian Fawcett (2003) incorporates just such a bioregional vision when describing his neighbourhood in Toronto's downtown west – a "micro neighbourhood whose boundary is defined more by taste and ethnicities."(p. 5) There are several blocks of

Somalis, Ethiopians, Latinos, and Koreans blending with the Portuguese and Italian majority. Fawcett writes of his home;

> I've come to renewed understanding of the importance of careful observation of the community around me… The local, a.k.a "the neighbourhood," - which I'll define as the geographical area a relatively healthy person can get around on foot - is also the area for the most direct perception left to ordinary human beings. It will have topological features, unique weather and familiar faces to make you understand that you are not doomed to be a stranger in a strange land… Here in Toronto's downtown west, the topological boundaries are marked primarily by human constructions, except to the North, where the Pleistocene shores of Lake Ontario are visible, a ridge atop which sits the fairy castle of Casa Loma and Wychwood Park, where Marshall McLuhan lived… (2003, pp. 4-5)

This theory of bioregionalism reflects an intelligence of place that pays attention to the specificity of the local, while valuing and measuring that specificity in the context of larger entities of time and space, namely , history and the world. Individuals measure themselves ethically as nested within a unique geological, biological and environmental condition. Bioregionalism offers many rich and diverse lines of inquiry yet to be fully explored.

The reciprocal relation: Place and self

In his poem " On the Full Tide" Tom Dawe (1974) reflects on his childhood and offers a deep sense of the participatory – reciprocal interaction with his place. He desperately seeks the recognition and approval of an old fisherman; yet this recognition is projected onto the land and the sea in which as a child he, too, is deeply invested.

I always felt that
he smiled at me then
as the pure surf smiled at me,
as the ringing cliffs
as the sea-birds
as the children smiled at me
And it was good.

There is something here that transcends mere place attachment that is central to the idea of bioregion. I wonder does it have to do with the sense that we are a part of our place, and our place is a part of us? There is an element of incorporeality – a deeply felt relationality that, when attended to, serves to bind us to place. The experience of the bioregion sees our connection to and dependence on *all* other life in the region. It assumes a knowledgeable, restrained and respectful use of nature as it recognizes the importance of relationships and systems as well as individuals. Jamake Highwater describes beautifully this notion in the Native American tradition – a tradition from which we have much to learn. Highwater (1981) says that at the end of the communal smoking ritual the participants murmur, "We are all related" (p. 189). His point has particular relevance for our culture as he points to what happens when people become alienated from their place; "when we destroy a people's experience they become destructive" (Highwater, 1981, p.189). In the Native American tradition, tolerance, ethics, duties and rights become unnecessary according to Highwater, for our relationship with all others is predicated on “the experience of the self as part of others. *‘We are all related*’” (author’s emphasis, p. 189).

This sense of relationality, of coming to know fully and honestly our place within the bioregion requires an openness, an attunement and engagement with the others, both the human and the more-than–human, who share our place. It requires a turn toward experience and the ‘experiential.’ How is it possible to allow children to know their place in this way? How is it possible nurture a sensibility for the gifts of their bioregion? So much of what we do in schools is through the objectifying stance of the sciences, our children learn ‘about’ things- there is little investiture of who they are and a deeply felt exploration of their fundamental connection to their place. We need another way of knowing – one that allows for other voices- other stories. It is through these other stories that children may discover, if not ‘who’ they are, at the very least, they begin to know ‘where’ they are (Howard, 2003). Language and story which leads out into the world in an imaginative, experiential engagement can allow children to turn to the articulatedness of things, to their groundedness. Perhaps it is possible to return to the conditions of human fulfillment and embeddedness in the life world of their place. Just maybe we can confront our place with awe and admiration, respect and wonderment. We must try to understand ourselves as participants in and not masters of our biotic communities and in doing so offer children a source of renewal and transformation. The poietic process can open our children’s hearts and minds to the call of their place, to its voice.

I know this voice, this solicitation, for there are moments when my life and the world’s life seem deeply interconnected. On the coast on which I live, thick, cold fog is drawn into the bay, ghostly tendrils seeking, grasping; skeins of salty vapour envelop the house and descend upon my awareness, dampening my enthusiasm and instilling a lethargy deep within my bones. Then, sometimes, the sun rises brilliantly to fill the bedroom, the cool air stirs the curtains; I hear the gulls cry, the leathery flap of poplar leaves and I rush, enervated, to the window to take in the morning. It is these times I sense my place as a sentient, dynamic landscape capable of its own moods and moments. Somehow, there seems to be a reciprocity between the world and me. There is an embeddedness, a discovery that my perceptions are part of a vast web of perceptions and sensations experienced by other bodies- not just mine, not even human, or even 'living' – but by wheeling gulls, crashing waves, and buffeting winds.

The promise of the literature of the bioregion

Louise Chawla (1999) interviewed fifty-six environmentalists about their motives for protecting the environment. Two sources of commitment were overwhelmingly indicated; firstly, positive experiences of natural environments in childhood and adolescence, and secondly, family role models who demonstrated an attentive respect for the natural world. The family members or other adults mentioned by the environmentalists were described by Chawla (2002, p. 213) as "voices of appreciation" that encouraged the child to be in natural areas receptively, without barriers of inattention, fear, or defensive control. Chawla's study has important implications for the nurturing of children in the life of their bioregion. Some explanation is necessary.

The power of literature to lead children into a greater awareness and "sensibility" for their place requires more attention - particularly when that literature is the work of those writers who give voice to the bioregion. This sensibility can be nurtured through an ecocritical approach to literary studies. As discussed in Chapter 4, ecocriticism asks how nature is represented in a poem, what role does the land play in the plot of a novel, how are the values expressed in a play consistent with ecological wisdom or how has literacy affected our relationship with the other than human world. Literary theory, for the most part, examines relations between the word and the world – the 'world' being synonymous with 'culture' or 'society'. Ecocriticism expands the idea of 'the world' to include the entire biotic community- "the ecosphere" (Glotfelty & Fromm, 1996, p. xix). By leading children to a greater 'sensibility', I mean the capacity for physical sensation, the ability to feel. This involves a pathic, embodied understanding of language. Something we downplay culturally, especially in education. Bioregional literature and the response to that literature may provide children with role models. Authors' experiences may possibly reveal the natural world in ways that nurture a child's connection to, and sensibility for, their place. This could be especially true when the literature leads out – from the classroom into the world.

Such a view of literature and the language arts calls for identifying writers and artists of the bioregion who reflect our place back to us, who lead us into the unseen depths so we may immerse ourselves in the living world around us. There are writers of place who allow us to be open, in degrees, to a sentient landscape in which we participate in, as David Abram's says, "sensate reciprocity" with the myriad others of our life region whether it be river valley, desert, lakeshore, prairie, mountain or coastline. But it is only when we slip out of the world solely defined by the human, and begin to trust the intelligence of our sensing bodies can we glimpse the generative depths, and the things around us may awaken to us. Yi Fu Tuan (1976) wrote;

> Still better is the use of literature for its power to clarify the nature of experience… for at a deep level literature is the accurate depiction of the ineffable in much of our lives. Most people have difficulty articulating even simple feelings and thoughts. Writers present a world that we have known (ie. experienced) and yet know only darkly; explicit knowing requires the illuminating structure of words and images. (p.261)

Literature allows an opening into our place—into elements of our life worlds inaccessibly buoyed, submerged darkly, and refracted just out of our reach. Yet poets get there and then stand off shore in the dazzling sparkle. Most often we are so busy we do not notice them there; we dig holes, we name the grains of sand and we construct elaborate crumbling castles. But every now and then we look up and squint, shielding our eyes to make out the shimmering figure whose voice is just audible on the wind. As a teacher I must scan the horizon for those voices and lead my students toward these voices. For when we attend to these voices we know our place in a different way; the words lead to a tacit, implicit awareness that our lives are part of an intricate web of perceptions and sensations, of a tidal flow that makes up a living, dynamic environment. There is a breathing sentience to which we belong. It is to this ineffability that E.J. Pratt (1986) seems to point to in " The Ground Swell":

> Three times we heard it calling with a low,
> Insistent note; at ebb-tide on the noon;
> And at the hour of dusk, when the red moon
> Was rising and the tide was on the flow;

There is a sense of denial of our own chosen alienation and a resistance to the 'calling'. It is our attempt to push down what is undeniable;

> Then, at the hour of midnight once gain,
> Though we had entered in and shut the door
> And drawn the blinds, it crept up from the shore...

John S. Mitchell (1983), too, describes the incessant tug, the pull of this place:

> boats upside down
> on red wharf
> cliffs surround and close
> centuries of eyes
> in each eye
> whispers and whispers
> in me

It is only the poet who can suggest that we hear with our eyes, see with our ears, taste with our fingertips. And again, there is a sibilant undertone of some discomfort, of unease, a perceptual reciprocal relation that unnerves. To gaze upon the cliffs is to feel oneself exposed and visible to the rocky crags. Just as the animate landscape speaks, so too it seems to see, even listen and hear. It is this experience that induces humans to project outward beyond the physical to the supernatural. This wonder and awe elicits a turning to the only possibility in our repertoire that allows us to understand such experiences- the realm of the spiritual, the religious. Reverent, sacred and sacramental images abound in the poetry of this bioregion. The elemental and the religious are inextricably intertwined. In Tom Dawe's (1984) "The Madonna" he describes a church abandoned in a small community. Yet even without the former inhabitants the church seems to have interiorized the natural powers of a living land; it is steeped in them:

> And there were certain still nights
> When the ocean pulsed in calm
> And duplicated every season's moon.

On such nights
The firm church steeple seemed
To waver down on a ribbon of tide…

Al Pittman (1968) in an early collection, *Seaweed and Rosaries*, writes in "St. Leonard's Revisited":

almost reverently
we walked among the rocks
of the holy church
and worshipped roses
in the dead yard
and came again to the cove
as they did after rosary
in the green and salty days (page?)

This deep spiritual inter-connectedness wends its way through Pat Byrne's (2000) "West Moon Song." The human and the natural world complement in a sympathetic coalescence, a relationality with elements of the beautiful and the sublime:

So tonight the west moon hangs over the harbour,
Shines down 'cross the headland and out 'cross the bay,
Shines down through the trees and rests on the graveyard,
As if looking for the souls of the ones moved away.

But there is more here than assigning the beauty of an animate Earth to the divine, to the super-natural; these poets are not merely abstracting out their experiences, for to do that would be to remove or deny the possibility that there is a commonality, an interdependence, that I, as perceiver, and the thing that I perceive, are as John Sallis says, part of the same 'elementals.' Rather, the poets speak of our dynamic participation in a cosmological whole. The poet walks in the mystical; the mysterious and straddles the world at once wonder-ful and unutterably other. Al Pittman stands on a dark and dangerous promontory.

From here on the headland
There is nothing
Between us and the world's dark end
But infinite distance
The night encloses us
As we cling to each other
In darkness
And fall like broken insects
From the sky (page?)

Yet here is the balancing act, the finding of our place in this borderland, this boundary where we belong, and still feel alien. It is in this tension, in the betweeness of our existence that we are truly human;

You walk knowing you
Walk with angels
Angry on either side

It is something you'll only do once
Between here and wherever it is you're bound (page?)

We walk in this yearning – in search of a common ground. We seek to strike the right balance in our separateness and in our sense of being a part of it all. Pittman walks the edge, the precipice, negotiating a place to be fully human-in-the world.

The poet that allows us to discover the wondrous and the mystical in the commonplace and everyday. Pittman finds what is awe-some in that most ubiquitous of birds—the sea gull. A deep sense of harmony abides in his words, of inhabiting place, of being a part of the world, not in any way separate from another sentient being to which we owe our deepest love and affection. There is the reciprocity here by which we can begin to know our place:

Something sacred he seems
raised for worship
above the grey sea altar
poised on priest wind hands
he awaits
the genuflection
a certain concern for eternity
kneels me on the salt wet rock
and seeming satisfied
with that small penance
he tips one wing in casual benediction
and moves on seaward
to command another's adoration.

The similarity in sacramental images is striking when Pittman's poem is compared to Cape Cod naturalist and poet John Hay's (1998) " The Gull:"

The wild white gull comes screaming, billowed and tossed
In the sacred air, over the shore and inland
On the storm. How far and soaring fast it flings
The springing magic of earth, feathers
Aflame in the cruciform of blood and sky,
And tendons taut with excellence! How high
And blest it wheels in tribute through the wind,
To turn past beauty's shaping to the sea!

We can turn to the poetry of the bioregion to flesh out our sense of relationality and our embeddedness within a living landscape. What this requires is an openness; for the aletheia of the poietic process to manifest itself necessitates an awareness and an engagement with the others, both the human and the more-than-human that share our place. The poietic calls for a turn to the *word* and a re-turn to the *world*. It requires an attunement to the writers who give voice to the Earth, but also a re-visioning of a sense of language and literature that leads out into the world.

When our students read bioregional literature and from their reading bump into a deeper sense of their embeddedness in a larger living system, and from this encounter reach toward writing, the lines between reading, writing and living blur. Distinctions collapse and literature, indeed literacy, can lead to life. By immersing children in the life of their place they can be drawn ever deeper into its absorbing complexities, into non-existent possibilities, and once engrossed and fully embodied in the task, it will act as a site of meaningful experience in the world—teacher and child walking together as companion and guide.

The inquiry now turns to the collection of the data and the central procedures and techniques of investigating student experience. The first is the writers notebook. The writers notebooks described in the next chapter were meant to be rich sites that allowed students to explore their connected existence , and nurture a deeper sensibility for their ecological selves. The notebooks became places in which the capacity of language for both stability and continuity, *and* for innovation and change, was played out in a generative matrix of thoughts, connections, memories and imaginings that allowed students to rethink their places in a larger living field.

Chapter 8: Land(marks): The Writers Notebook

The school year began, as school years usually do, in the brilliant sunshine and soft offshore breezes of September. In the early weeks of the new year I got to know my Grade 9 Language Arts students. I explained carefully the project that I was undertaking and I asked for their cooperation. I told them that over the next several weeks, we would be exploring, through reading, writing and responding to the literature of our bioregion. We talked about how language reflects, and may influence their relationship and understanding of, the larger life processes in which they are embedded. We discussed the concept of the bioregion, the relational structure of living in place and looked for examples around us to demonstrate how so much of who we are, our culture, heritage, and way of life is directly tied to the places in which we live and the rhythms of time, tide and season.

These were not difficult discussions. As indicated earlier, the students seemed keenly aware of the many connections and the quality of interdependency that marked their lives. They *understood* that almost all aspects of their lives are influenced by the larger living landscape. During the first few weeks of that September I took the time to learn about each of my students' lives and how they understood conceptually the ecological principles at work in their lives. A key component of this initial introduction was the writers notebooks that we set up in our first week together. These were simply project covers, or Duotangs®, with detachable three holed loose leaf that were portable, inexpensive and would serve as a repository for their thoughts and responses for the twelve weeks of the project. The writer's notebooks were meant to be spaces in which students could record the connections, the observations, the descriptions and evidence of the ecological relationships that emerged for them out of daily living. The notebooks would allow the students to address questions that increase awareness of how they live within their places. This aspect of the project, as indicated earlier, is similar in approach as that of Marilyn Doerr (2004) who, in teaching high school ecology, employed *currere*, a self- hermeneutical and phenomenological method (Pinar, 1975, p. 403) that allowed students to address questions "that increase awareness of how they live within their worlds" outside the oppressive habits of compliance that schools produce (Doerr, 2004, p. 9).

In introducing the concept of the writers notebook to the students it was important for them to see the books as intimate spaces to explore freely outside the often stultifying, contrived, rigidity of many classroom practices. I gradually introduced the notebooks as a space for transformative practice (O'Sullivan, 1999; O'Sullivan and Taylor, 2004). I wanted the books to be a place in keeping with Maxine Greene's assertion that

> (w)e need spaces... for expressions, for freedom... where living person's can come together. It must be a space of dialogue, a space where a web of relationships can be woven, and where a common world can be brought into being and continually renewed. (Greene, 1984, p. 296)

The notebooks would become important tools for the students' tentative inquiring into their tacit assumptions, perceptions, expectations and actions. It was my hope that the notebooks would become a fertile medium out of which fragile, yet tenacious roots of ecological sensibility may unfold. The notebooks would allow students to go in and down to explore the felt-sense (Gendlin, 1981), to attend to the body, to the pre-verbal that comes before the cultural patterns, assumptions, rules and values that we, as members of this culture, share as 'reality.' The focus of the writers notebooks would be the "ecological self" (O'Sullivan, 2004, p. 13), the co-constituted relationships, and modes of reciprocity and the lived experience of these ways of being.

In creating a protected space for writing and thinking, I drew heavily on the work of Gendlin whose ideas about felt sense as a "a body-sense of meaning" (1981, p. 10) exemplifies the ecological physical and linguistic coupling of our biology and our thoughts, imagination, emotion and expression. Sondra Perl (2004), whose work brings Gendlin's thinking to the creative act of writing and to the teaching of writing, also informed my thinking and practice when introducing the writers notebooks to my students. I adapted Perl's "Guidelines for Composing," an exploratory writing technique designed to "give as an experiential base from which to examine how our bodies and minds are connected, how meaning emerges not only from cognition, but from intuition, and how the body itself is implicated in knowing and in the construction of knowledge" (2004, p. xvi).

As suggested earlier, contrary to post-modern and post-structuralist thinkers, this project is guided by the belief that language holds generative power (Kohak, 1984; Fisher, 2002; Maturana and Varela, 1998; Primavesi, 2001); it is not a prison that traps us, but an open field where we might play. Undoubtedly, we are constructed by language and culture, yet language-ing and the metaphoric process offer a paradox. Language and metaphor perpetuate culture, behaviour, ideas, a social life, and at the same time makes new phenomena possible. Language contains the capacity for stability and continuity *and* for innovation and change. Maturana and Varela write, "We human beings are human beings only in language, there is no limit to what we can describe, imagine and relate" (1998, 206-11).

Writing with felt sense

Guided by the work of Gendlin and Perl I wanted the notebooks to become spaces in which the tension between stability and change might serve as a means to nurture the ecological self. I envisioned the notebooks as spaces that allow to emerge a sensibility for our interconnection and interdependence with a larger living field; I saw them as creative clearings that make things present and visible to us that we would not otherwise perceive. It was my hope that the students might access something new, by coming to understand that language and meaning are connected to inchoate, bodily senses that can with guidance and practice, be accessed.

In the first two classes that I introduced the writers notebooks I devoted twenty to thirty minutes to discuss listening to the body and drawing upon felt sense for inspiration and as a source of creative renewal. I began simply by asking them about the mind-body connection. It didn't take long before 'butterflies' in the stomach came up and other readily identifiable physiological manifestations of fear, surprise and joy. It was a start, but I wanted them to distinguish between feelings and felt sense. Feelings are easily identified, but felt sense not readily so. I thought the subtleties might be lost on them as some students persisted with sensational stories of mind over matter, incidents having to do with telepathy, bare feet, hot coals, and beds of nails being the most popular.

They needed to understand that felt sense was more vague, murky, puzzling and unsettling. Gradually, they came to understand felt sense more as the niggling sense that will not go away until we respond to it somehow. The students provided examples of forgotten names or titles of movies that 'bothered' them for hours until it could be retrieved in a flood of released tension. They came to understand that the sense communicates something that is prior to words or thoughts. I used the terms 'embodied,' 'felt sense', 'body intelligence' and 'body knowledge.' It was important they understand it takes practice attending to felt sense to develop bodily intelligence. Together we would experience the process that allowed felt sense to form; learn to listen to what it is saying and call upon it when we were writing.

Through the generative power of linguistic and physical couplings and recombinations, narrative and poetry produces and reproduces possible realities, what Martha Nussbaum calls "non-existent possibilities." The notebooks were meant to be a repository of thoughts, connections, memories, stories, poems, insights and imaginings that would take students beyond the actual to realize alternatives, and possible perspectives. The notebooks were designed to help students radically rethink their place in the larger living world, to be sensible to the life force to which they belong, to express this belonging as clearly and precisely as possible by connecting their lives to the more than human community of life.

Another task was to help my students understand the space represented in the notebooks. In the first days we talked about the notebooks as a repository for collecting things. This was an idea quite familiar to middle school students. We brainstormed ideas about what may go into the notebooks; they came to understand they could describe what they see, what they hear, thoughts that occur, responses to sights, sound, feelings, memories.

We moved into a discussion about the notebook as a place for thinking and reflecting. I shared with them writing about the art of journaling from Clare Walker Leslie and Charles Roth's (2000) *Keeping a Nature Journal*, Randy Bomer's (1997) *Time for Meaning: Crafting Literate Lives in Middle and High School*, Donald Murray's *Write to Learn* (1990) and Georgia Heard's (2001) *Writing from Home*. It was important that the students grasped the purpose of the notebooks. While diary writing and day journals were commonplace for them, the writers notebook was to be a repository of insights, observations and feelings that implied further writing. This distinction was subtle yet important. The notebooks spoke to, prepared the ground for, and launched future pieces of writing; they served as space to collect *toward further writing*. This distinction would take a few weeks for students to grasp.

Allowing the writer's notebooks to be a rich site to explore their connected existence, the 'ecological self,' meant ensuring the students' first entries were rewarding and fun. I began from the premise that we generate knowledge from the practice of living, that knowledge is not individually derived and held, but rather generated within relationship with others and the world around us. We would begin in the classroom and eventually the children would move outside to engage with the living spaces in their lives. To help me think about the practice of close observation and attention to detail that was outside the objectifying stance of a typical science field trip and interrupt the deep rooted tendency to break down and quantify, I drew inspiration the approach to scientific inquiry developed by Goethe (Seamon and Zajonc, 1998; Bortoft, 1996). Goethe challenges the atomism of modern science with a method or a "way of science" that emphasizes, instead, "an intimate first-hand encounter between student and thing studied." (Seamon, 1998, p. 1) Goethe's science is predicated on the "primacy of the whole" (Bortoft, 1996, p. 6). Many of the writing prompts and practices I developed involved close observation and participatory engagement. I wanted the children to develop their perceptual abilities through guided practice and record and respond with patience to their experience. It was through this embodied encounter with what is often closest and unnoticed that detail, pattern, diversity, and interdependence might emerge and reveal itself. It must be made clear it was not my attention to expect from the students the rigorous and exacting quality of observation and interpretation demanded by Goethe's method. However, by coming to see more intimately, in the spirit of Goethe, children may be nurtured in developing a deeper sensibility for the existence of their ecological selves.

David Seamon (1998) writes that Goethe believed that it was not adequate to simply develop keen powers of observation. Indeed, Goethe argued it was through heightened abilities to observe the living earth that deepened our inner sense of connectedness and relationality with a larger living world. Quoting Goethe, Seamon writes;

> "Each phenomenon in nature, rightly observed, wakens in us a new organ of inner understanding." As one learns to see more clearly, he or she also learns to see more *deeply*. One becomes more "at home" with the phenomenon, understanding it with greater empathy, concern, and respect. (1998. p. 3)

So, it is to the “spirit of Goethe’s way of science” that I turn to find a language that allows for a better articulation of what it means to look closely, to observe and record. Goethe’s way opens up a language of nature, of pattern, of wholeness, of networks, of detail, diversity and connection.

And so it was, with twenty-six brilliant new notebooks in front of them, I sensed the students’ hesitancy as they leafed through the empty pages of white lined paper. They needed to begin in a way that was interesting and non-threatening. I began in a way that I usually do when trying to ‘win over’ a reticent, doubtful group; I decided to begin with a story of my own.

I told the students about an experience I had a few years ago that helped me realize more deeply a sense of interconnection and relational awareness. My friend and I planned to take our children for a day trip to Gros Morne National Park in western Newfoundland. My friend’s son, who was seven years old at the time, is autistic and rarely uses the spoken word to communicate. ‘Richie’ displays the emotional distance of autistic children and will not maintain eye contact or show affection. His condition locks him away from his family. The day was beautiful with only a slight breeze, yet a large swell threw breakers that curled thunderously on the cobble beach and rugged outcroppings. The sun danced on the waves; we beach combed and explored, but it didn’t take long for everyone to notice the effect the ocean was having on Richie. He was drawn to the waves; his father took him out on the rocky tidal flats to see the breakers shoot salty spray high into the air. We sat on the beach and watched the two figures in the distance. When my friend came back he was visibly moved, “I can’t believe it,” Richie’s father told his wife breathlessly, “Richie looked at the breakers and was so engaged; he lifted his arms out wide and kept saying, ‘I be free, I be free’ over and over. Where did that come from? Where did he get that?”

I told my story as an entry for my writers notebook that could lead to interesting reflection later. Predictably, the students wanted to probe deeper into the story. “What did Richie mean by ‘I be free?’” asked Maurice.

“I’d say it was the wind and the power, you know like sometimes you just want to go out in a big storm... just to be in it,” replied Mark.

Jessica wanted more information, “ Had Richie been at a beach before? Were there other people on the beach?”

And so it went until I said, “Okay let’s respond someway in our notebooks. What does the story remind you of? What thoughts came to you? How did you feel as you listened? Why? Do you have a story of something wondrous that happened to you outside? Something that happened to someone you know? I began with Perl’s (2004) Guidelines for Composition that I adapted for this project. The students’ ability to speak with language and experience through a theory of embodied knowing would honour a stance of ecological holism through inclusivity. For ultimately, this project is not about the words generated - language per se, but about the language-ing human beings sitting before me. These were children who are embedded in their places, in their history, in their culture. It was my task to allow these children to speak back to and extend that history and culture, using the given language to create something new, to uncover what is often taken for granted in their relationship with the natural world. It was fitting to acknowledge our tight coupling with the environment and start with the body.

After asking them to find a way to get comfortable, to close their eyes or look away from anything distracting, to sit quietly for a minute and think about their breathing, the students settled. There were a few stifled giggles, but for the most part they shook out their hands and sat breathing quietly. I proceeded through a series of questions that helped them get a deeper sense of how my story made them feel. I asked them to jot down connections and memories that the story helped evoke. I provided some writing time after each question or prompt. I asked, "How are you right now?" What did you find most intriguing in the story?" "Why do you think it is?" "What draws you to this idea?" "What is it all about for you?" I paused between questions and they jotted notes.

I reminded them frequently to write whatever comes. "What's missing I inquired?" "Does it feel complete?" "Are there any images, words, or phrases that allow you express something in a fresh way?" They looked at the list of ideas and jot notes to see which ones spoke to them, was the most compelling, all the while being asked to focus on their felt sense. They sat quietly with a topic in mind, to sense what the ideas evoked in them. They were asked to consider the "So what?" of the topic; to allow the felt sense and emerging meaning to come together. And then I stopped talking because I could see that some were actively engaged in writing already. I moved quietly around the room and felt as if I was being intrusive as more students began to write - intently. I went to my desk and sat down with a sense of relief, tinged with excitement for what was happening in the moment.

In the coming days I provided prompts in the form of questions and statements that allowed the students to further explore the relational quality of their lives. I used Perl's adapted *Guidelines for Composition* on a weekly basis and the students slowly began to speak from within their own experiencing with the world. But it was not without difficulties. At first my prompts puzzled them. I sat with students to assure them that writing about the family potato garden was indeed, 'alright' to put in their notebooks. It took some convincing to convey that when we really give it some thought, "Nothing" is not an accurate response to the question, "What do you see from your living room window?" My students' reluctance to attach importance to that, which is closest to them, while frustrating, should have come as no surprise. In relating to a colleague this challenge to allow the students to observe, hear, smell and feel that which surrounds them in the everyday, she replied, "Of course, they don't think it's important; you never really appreciate what's around you until you have to leave it and then come back." This troubled me, as I had heard it before as conventional wisdom. The off hand comment shook and haunted me. But as the students continued to write in the coming weeks of the project I was to understand that the belief that leaving a place allows us to better appreciate it on our return indicates, rather than the leaving, the lack of opportunity to get to know our places when we were there. Too often the curriculum fosters the outward gaze, the migratory stance, that what is important, worthwhile and wondrous exists not in the immediate, the personal and the local, but in the world 'out there,' the focus often shifts to that mythic globalized space which in effect exists nowhere. One early hurdle in the study was to allow the children to understand the worth in coming to know and value the web of natural and cultural relationships that define their lives.

Providing prompts for students was not meant to be prescriptive, but to provide for them guideposts to follow as they filled the pages of their notebooks. I wanted students to make their writers notebooks a part of their lives, not only in class but outside as well. While this was the intent it was made quite clear during our early discussions the reality proved to be quite different. In the third week of the project a quick survey of the class indicated that the notebooks were generally regarded as an in-class activity. To encourage out of class writing I provided some guidance and parameters - five entries a week. At least one of those entries was to be about some aspect of life outside- out of doors- a favourite place, an interesting natural feature, a memory, a routine or family activity. For most students the direction was just the impetus they needed. As for most of us, adolescents require and welcome the liberating constraints that assist them to focus on the task at hand. Randy Bomer (1995) quotes Maxine Green on this same point when she wrote freedom doesn't always mean freedom from; it might mean freedom to (p. 53). I, too, was learning, in setting up the writers notebooks as a means to nurture ecological sensibility, that my students had to learn to explore freely in the classroom, to play, to improvise, to follow thoughts and make connections, to open their awareness to what is inside them and how it is inextricably connected to what is outside them.

Gradually, it came together for most students. Over the weeks the number and quality of entries improved. Most started out as literal, straightforward observations.

> From my living room window I get a wonderful view of the ocean. Not only the ocean do I see but an old abandoned blue house. It has been there as long as I can remember. There is a window on the side of the house that I can see. In that window I can see a small basket with two flowers in it.

An early strategy used by some students was to rely on diary-like entries in which their observations and thoughts were recorded. Their attention to detail developed gradually. Ryan wrote in one early entry;

> It is a chilly October evening. The sky is clear, the sun is just setting over the Northern Peninsula in the far west and a biting cold, yet, gentle wind is blowing. I see a tiny navy blue Toyota Corolla and wood smoke sinks in the air. Next to the vehicle I see a neatly stacked wood pile, cut, cleaved and ready to burn..

Some students hung on to 'what I saw on the bus ride home' longer than I would have liked, while other students turned over insightful and touching entries that would find their way into larger pieces. At the end of each week I collected their writers notebooks and commented on their entries; I would ask further questions, offer writing advice. This was a dialogue; as I could hear their voices, I could respond. Over the weeks, slowly, the notebooks evolved into the space I had hoped they would - a place to explore emerging consciousness of their connectedness to a larger living landscape. This intimate exploration of the personal, the unique, the local, the immediate was echoing Madeline Grumet's belief that if we do not use our personal experiences we risk turning away from, " the places we were most thrilled, most afraid, most ashamed, and most proud... our experience gathers up its convictions and its questions and quietly leaves the room" (p. xvii).

Braided lives

On the night of September 19th, 2004, just three weeks into the research project, the more than human was to speak once again with a force of voice to jar us all to pay close attention. A fierce early autumn hurricane swept up the Atlantic seaboard taking communities by surprise with its powerful winds and storm surges. On Monday morning, the sun penetrated the spent clouds to reveal damaged roads, break waters and boats. The sea heaved fitfully; massive undulating swells pounding the shoreline for days.

When I entered my classroom that morning the students were huddled in subdued clusters discussing the events of the weekend. Everyone had heard of the loss of the crab boat *Ryan's Commander* and the drowning deaths of the two Ryan brothers for whom the boat was named. Hailed as a million dollar modern fishing vessel equipped with all the "advances in navigation technology, weather prediction, and vessel design" (Pickersgill, 2004, p. A5), the ship was rolled under just off shore by a massive North Atlantic comber. The dramatic rescue of the other crewmembers plucked clinging from the cliffs of Spiller's Cove touched us all.

Outside, the ocean roared and the land shuddered; my students were eager to talk about the events. It was not long before the discussion turned to the frailty of humans in the face of the awesome power of the ocean environment. There was an attitude of quiet reflection in my students that morning. Was this the natural contemplation of our own mortality upon hearing of the death of a friend or acquaintance? After all, most of my students and their families shared much in common with the drowned fishermen. But the students moved quickly from details of the sinking to a muted and respectful account of what they had seen and heard in their own communities that weekend of storm. It was as if the ocean, the watery realm and the storm it had spawned, had broken through, bumping them off-centre; a momentary Copernican shift occurred, and the uncertainty of such a shift brought humility in the face of complex immensity. We spent most of the class talking and then I asked them to turn to their writers notebooks. Outside the sky cleared; the sea continued to heave relentlessly; the students wrote with a concentration I had yet to see from them before.

That weekend of storm was a genesis of sorts, for out of it seemed to come a realization, a dawning made real of our interconnection with the larger living world. I attribute the events of that weekend for allowing us to glimpse a great truth, a realization that often dissipates with time, unless it is nurtured and allowed to take root. In Robert Frost's poem, *For Once, Then Something*, the speaker peers into a well searching the black depths. He catches a fleeting glimpse of something, but then it is gone, obscured by his own reflection – an image, from which he cannot escape to see beyond. On that Monday morning we were able to see beyond, to have our self-imposed importance forcibly pushed aside and we were made to hear the voice of the sea. My students saw, briefly, how inextricably we are linked with the watery mystery that surrounds us. Their comments that morning revealed a sense all our lives are connected with the larger life force of land and sea. "My dad was on that boat last summer" said one girl. Another added that the Ryan's Commander had been in their community to pick up supplies. But the tacit awareness of interconnection emerged most tellingly in somber, respectful comments about the weekend of storm they had all just witnessed. There was a consciousness of their place in a larger living field of relations. I sensed it. A consciousness related the word's meaning – knowing something with others. The English word *conscious* emerged out of the Latin *con-* together and *sci* – knowing. The students seemed communally more aware, present to the moment and their place in a more than human world.

The next week the local newspaper published a commentary by columnist Peter Pickersgill who, while honouring the memory of the drowned brothers, subtly pointed to the disconnect that the sinking represents in our relationship with the ocean. Pickersgill believes that in recent years fishers take false refuge in technology. This overconfidence can be seen in the shift that has occurred in the last decade in the cultural tradition of naming fishing boats. The custom had been to name vessels after daughters, wives and female relatives. It was an evocation of the more benign spirits of the sea, a call on the forces of maternal care and compassion, to entreat the ocean's feminine essences. "Calling your vessel after the woman you loved is like a lucky charm, a talisman beseeching the female spirit to attract, like a magnet the opposite male spirits afloat in peril on the sea and draw their vessel home to safe berth in a sheltered harbour" (Pickersgill, 2004, p. A5). Lately, ships' owners, bolstered by technological bravado and hubris, have turned to more aggressive masculine names like Cruiser, Enterprise, Intimidator and Commander. We read the article together and I asked the students to sit with their felt sense, to allow it to guide their written response in the notebooks. The newspaper article, the space provided for in writers notebooks, the students' lives, the more than human world came together to nurture entries that probed themes I could never have anticipated. The notebooks provided a clearing for students to explore a complex process of identifications, and as time went by, ever widening ecological identifications. The writers notebooks bear witness and document an emergent ecological sensibility. A sensibility born out of experience and environment that speaks to us when we are open to hear that voice. It is a basic ecological mechanism that connects us to our environment.

It enables us to learn by alerting us to our surroundings; it helps to shape our knowledge by influencing our memories. The writers notebook entries illustrate children honouring attachments and interconnections; these realizations are products of learning. The writers notebooks point to an ecological sensibility that is nurtured, awakened, advanced, realized, dis-covered and de-veloped in communities where we live and work; it is a nurturance that is deeply relational, or braided, in nature.

Chapter 9: Awakening

Jonathan

Patience: Emerging and enduring

Jonathan's expressive capacity allows for an openness to the multi layered complexity that is his surroundings. Jonathan is a bright, sensitive boy who considers himself an outdoorsman. He spends his weekends, and some evenings after school, in the 'country' as he calls the forests and hills behind his community. His entry depicts an at home-ness, a listening, thoughtful attentiveness to reciprocity and dialogue.

> I hear some people complain about where they live; always seeing the bad, always thinking somewhere else is better. Sometimes I feel that way but if you take time to really look around you there is so much to see. You have to pay close attention though or you miss so much. We are so busy, we expect all things to be there at the flick of a button; but being outside is not like that. It most often take quiet patience.
>
> After school in the evening or on Saturdays I like to go for walks in the woods. I walk through boggy marsh holes hearing the squish of my boots. I see tracks, a muskrat, a large vole. Each track, each bog hole tells a story. I like to read this story better. That's like the birds, too. What are they saying? Are they warning of another creature? I almost think that I can actually understand what the birds are saying, that they are talking to me.
>
> I see rabbits leads in the spongy moss that rabbits have used for years and years. Young birch trees are gnawed and nibbled. I see old spruce trees with age –old markings chopped into their mossy bark by a woodsmen who passed this way a long time ago. I often wish I could see what these old trees have seen – the animals, the people.
>
> Past the old trees, the old trees up and over an outcrop of rock and I reach my destination – a pond where the water is so still there's double of everything in reflection. Two loons live here and the beaver is still at work; little chips of aspen trees float at the waters edge. I feel like I am a part of the rock and when I stay still I sense I am unnoticeable, like I blend in, like I have always been there. They carry on with their lives and I watch, watch the loons dive, the beaver swim, the fly that can't get off the water in time and is devoured by a mud trout. I am at home in the woods, away from the noise, the TV, the machines[1]. I am a part of all this and this is a part of me.

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[1] *a colloquial term used to describe automobiles of various types.*

I was surprised by the element of relationality that this entry, and others, reflected in both manner and tone. Yet, considering the recent painful events in the lives of many of my students, the drowning death of a fellow student, the dramatic sinking and rescue operations that filled the news, it was not unexpected the students would seek to move their lives forward by responding to a deeply felt tension to make sense out of suffering. I believe now it was the bearing of pain, of anger, and confusion that provided a depth to student entries that I did not expect. Several entries touched on a deep undercurrent of relationality that I came to see as best described as an attitude, and an orientation of *patience*. Jonathan's entry depicts an abiding *patience* in his attention for, his attending to, all elements in his surroundings.

Patience is not a trait or virtue that immediately comes to mind when we think of children and adolescents, or even most adults today. Patience connotes maturity and even wisdom. We value patience, and teach our children very early to forgo their immediate desires and impulses for instant indulgence by insisting they wait their turn. Children learn early to stand in line, to wait with self-possession the arrival of important celebrations. "I can't wait," is the excited childhood refrain. The child is expected to adhere to the natural order and passage of time, to wish, even in fantasy, to circumvent these laws is frowned upon as being wild, impetuous, immature, im-patient. The much-anticipated birthday party or Christmas morning will arrive "in its own good time" and the child is warned, "do not to wish your time away."

And yet, patience is encouraged against a backdrop of a "hypermodern culture" (Borgmann, 1992; Spretnak, 1999) predicated on instant gratification through ramped up media advertising and the technological quick fix. "Why wait, you can have it now," "no money down, no payment until 2007," is the television mantra. How is it possible to nurture patience in our technological, commodified 'reality?' Doesn't patience become more of a burden, an obstacle to be avoided, a sign of passivity or even weakness? What is the place of patience in our action- oriented, progress defined western culture? Patience shows strength, forbearance, a bearing with others. We are patient with; it is the 'with' that indicates an Other, a subject on whom our patience is bestowed. Patience recognizes complexity and depth, the multi layers of any reality. Impatience, on the other hand, "cuts through;" in an impetuous swipe the Gordian knot is severed to be hailed as a "no nonsense approach," and "getting the job done." Patience honours those things that are deep and definite with calmness and endurance.

"You have to pay close attention though or you will miss so much," writes Jonathan. When I am patient with an Other, I must attend to them, to care, to tend, to be present to them. In my attention to the Other, I am attentive, aware, concerned, and mindful of the other's complexity. It is the imperative force, as in Emmanuel Levinas' phenomenology, that makes its claim. In my patience the other may reveal herself more fully. I am bound to the other in a responsive relatedness. Jonathan's entry demonstrates an attention for events that reveal themselves; he is particularly attuned to what things do rather than what they are; "Each track, each bog hole telling a story…", "I often wish I could see what these old trees have seen, the animals and people…" The bestowing of subjectivity, of personhood and identity on the elements in his surroundings is very strong. Milton (2002) writes, "we can perceive personhood in other natural entities, such as ecosystems, Mother Earth, and nature as a whole, because these things can relate to us, and /or appear to do so, in responsive ways" (p. 79).

A self-emergent, autopoietic quality is evident in Jonathan's entry. There is a kind of commonality, a be-longing with others of all kinds. There is a yearning to be part of it all - not so much an undifferentiated unity, but a sense of comm-unity, not union, but comm-union. It is this co-evolutionary understanding that we are a part of, yet separate from that lets us say that we, too, are nature, while the feeling of distance implies that the natural world is Other. Jonathan is apart of, "I feel like I am a part of the rock and when I stay still I am unnoticeable, like I blend in," and at the same time, distinct from; he is the observer, "They carry on with their lives and I watch, watch the loons dive, watch the beaver swim…" How is it possible to appreciate difference and identity at the same time? It would seem to involve understanding that whatever I distinguish from myself is both distinct from me, and at the same time intrinsically connected to me. It is language that allows me to express the profundity of this distinction as a way of communicating this co-evolutionary cohesion that is a particular consciousness of ourselves as distinct from, yet intrinsically connected to, whatever is being described. Language, metaphor, and evocative literary descriptions have the capacity to reveal our structural coupling – a coupling that takes place primarily through language-ing. It is through language that the patient "attending to" is manifested and becomes an undeniably deep-rooted dynamic of emotion and relation - in another word - love.

Jonathan's patience is a careful attention recognizable as love. It is a refusal to underestimate the complexity of living beings and their environmental interactions. His concluding words, "I am a part of this and this is a part of me" emerges out of a quiet abiding of time and process that is capable of arousing the kind of wonder Descartes called, "the surprise of the soul" (Primavesi, 2000, p. 15). We find ourselves paying close attention to the living world, as it calls for our attention, to "sense the demand to respect all the others, and the other animals too" (Lingis, 1999, p. 406). It is through reflection, through language and metaphor, that Jonathan seems to come to them. There is the sense of an awakening, a kindling of attentiveness and in so doing, Jonathan sees himself in a new way.

Matt

Respectful forbearance

Matt writes about the events of that September and what is awakened is a deep and abiding respect for the natural rhythms and cycles.

> I feel bad for what happened to the men of the "Ryan's Commander." I remember hearing it on the news, my parents were glued to the radio that morning. These guys set out in a hurricane for home. They put a lot of faith in their technology; there were deadlines to meet, they had to get home. There is more pressure and stress in the fishing business. One time you just had to wait. If you couldn't get out- you couldn't get out. That was it. Somehow the whole thing shows a disrespect for the weather and the conditions- for the ocean in a way. Sometimes you just have to be patient because no matter what you can't control the weather and you certainly can't control the sea. When I think about it I feel it just isn't right, something is wrong with what happened.

Matt believes at the centre of a tragic event is the notion of "not having to wait," and the expectation "of having to be patient." Being impatient, he writes, "shows a disrespect for the weather and the conditions." On reading Matt's entry I am compelled to stay with his words. In what way is it possible to be patient with the weather, with the sea? What kind of patience is this? Is it the same kind of patience I call upon in the grocery store check out line? Is it the patience I require to quell my anger when by computer freezes and I lose my work? The English noun "patience" has its origins in the Latin *patientia,* which means to suffer (OED, 2002). The word patience has it roots in pain, trouble, injustice and our response to these conditions. The word connotes calmness, composure and the abiding of time or circumstances as we wait expectantly, with anticipation for something to come to pass. There is the element of denial present, of delay approached with quiet waiting. Matt picks up on this calm acceptance, as a trait he believes is rare today. "One time you just had to wait. If you couldn't get out, you couldn't get out. That was it." The weather speaks; it must be obeyed, respected in its being. But in what way is there a sense of Other in these words that places the human within the larger, sentient, living world? Contained in Matt's words is the implicit understanding of subjectivity, and relationality. His words betray a tacit awareness of an engagement with an animate, living world with which we can be patient.

I draw on Heidegger (1966; 1986), Foltz (1995), Borgmann, (1992), Maturana and Varela (1992) and Fisher (2002) to explicate the relationship between the more than human world and the technological, commodified social condition in which we currently live. Without going into an in-depth discussion of the technological dynamic, I believe we will see in Matt's notebook entry, and in others, the difference between, on the one hand, a life patterned to the needs of human and non human nature, to the rhythms of the life cycle, the ebb and flow of tide, the passage of the seasons, and on the other hand, a life patterned to the needs of a technological, bureaucratic society, to the vagaries of the market and machine.

This brings us back to Matt's idea that we "have to be patient" with the weather, that we can show a "disrespect" for the elements. How is it possible to be *patient* with the weather? What is Matt implying in his use of the word patience in this way? We are patient *with*, have patience *for*. It is relational. Does this *with* and *for* imply, in some way, Being, or *Presence*? Heidegger helps us to understand this relation by describing a quality of the larger living world, of Being, he called *phusis*, " the self-emerging that lingers and endures, and holds sway, all the while intrinsically inclining back toward the concealment from which it arose" (Foltz, 1995, p. 129). Heidegger writes that which truly endures and holds sway is that which is "essential," that which, in its enduring, concerns us, that which persistently moves us and matters to us. He suggests that it is not through "detached observation of what is just there, but rather through our involvement with what matters most that things disclose themselves to us most primordially and most truly" (Foltz, 1995, p. 129). To the Greeks, phusis was a kind of *poiesis*, or "bringing forth;" it was the arising of something out of itself. More recently, Maturana and Varela (1998) use the term auto-*poiesis* as *a self-making* capacity held by entities and organisms. An entity can engage us in the manner of *phusis* as it unfolds and emerges of and from itself, while continually returning back into itself – revealing or disclosing itself out of its own concealed abundance. Heidegger's point is that we may experience the world, the

Earth, and its elements in such a way, in its self-unfolding emergence. The Earth can be known as an object, weighed, measured, photographed from outer space, it can be mined by an extractive economy (Berry, 1988), yet prior to this the Earth is a region of the world that supports and nourishes only by remaining closed upon itself. The Earth is that from which *phusis* arises, into which it continually withdraws. Phenomenologically, it seems to present one side by withholding another.

Science is, perhaps, converging on a sense of what Heidegger may have been trying to describe as it reveals more fully that our perception, as delivered through our physical senses, is fragmentary and superficial. Quantum physics and mechanics are taking us beyond the material, into what may be described as *presence*; subatomic particles, of which everything is composed, are fluctuations of energy and information that make up all living things, and at the quantum level this energy and information may be described as a cloud, a void.

> The crucial question that scientists today are asking is what is the nature of this emptiness from where we all come? Is it just a void or the womb of creation? ... And it seems that everything we call form and phenomena, that we call observer and observed, is all coming from the same place, including our own thoughts (Chopra, 2005, pp. 6-9).

What there is may be described as a *presence or perhaps soul*, and in that presence everything comes and goes; this, I believe, is related to what Heidegger may have been describing in his notion of *phusis,* the presence that brings forth, and reveals a more primordial sense of being. George Steiner writes, "It is hidden Being that gives the rock its dense 'thereness,' that makes the heart pause when a kingfisher alights, that makes our own existence inseparable from that of others" (1978, p. 69). Matt is convinced that the elements, the weather, wind and tide are entities unto themselves His observation, in a sense, allows for their essence to emerge out of their unfolding.

Matt's conviction seems to be naïve, however, it may be of particular significance. His observations open the process of fundamental questioning. The vision of the child can suggest interesting possibilities of pedagogical significance. For me, Jonathan's entry reveals, in a new way, how the natural elements of weather and tide can be understood . Matt's view is that they can be seen to exist independent of human expectation and design. His words open a space to better comprehend a living world that warrants our forbearance, respect and patience.

In Heidegger's thinking the Earth is not only that in which plants take root and houses are built, it is also the human body, the sound of a word, the text of a story. The Earth is the sound and breath that carries the words of a poem, the wind, the atmosphere, *spiritus*, breathing life into the world. There may be times when we are enraptured, touched and see the world in such a way, but, for Heidegger, if we relegate these events to mere experiences, they are relegated to the sphere of mere subjectivity. For Heidegger, the "impression comes to prevail that everything man encounters only exists in so far as it is his own construct" (Foltz, 1995, p. 10). When the living world is objectified, or indifferently present to detached observation, or concealed by a gaze that recognizes only commodity or object, when this happens the living Earth that "stirs and strives," that speaks and enthralls, remains concealed. This aspect of Being designated by *phusis* is denied.

As mentioned above, Heidegger's *phusis* echoes the concept of autopoiesis (self-making) coined by Chilean biologists of cognition, Maturana and Varela (1992) to describe the systematic organization of living beings. The term refers to the dynamic, self-producing and self-maintaining network of processes within live organisms. Autopoietic entities have a tendency to interact with other recognizable autopoietic entities, and with their environment. The environment, in its relationship with an autopoietic entity, has dynamics of its own, distinct from those of the living being. It is this distinction between being and environment that is crucial in Maturana's and Varela's theory. As observers and subjects, we understand that two entities are distinct from each other, independent – living being and environment. But between them, there is, at the same time, a necessary structural congruence in which the evolution of organism and environment merges. This congruence and ongoing process of interaction and change is called "structural coupling" (Maturana and Varela, 1992, pp. 94- 105).

James Lovelock's Gaia theory presupposes that the Earth, the planet itself, is an autopoietic entity, that is, one which possesses features of organization analogous with, but not identical to, the physiological processes of individual systems (Primavesi, 2004, p. 5). Lovelock's theory sees the Earth as a very complex living system of interacting living and non-living components. The Earth is a tightly coupled, bounded system in which its constituent organisms and their environment evolve together. We humans have co-evolved with our physical environment over billions of years. Our lives depend on the evolution of others communities of organisms, ecosystems held in balance by the stability of their environments.

So, Heidegger's *phusis*, Maturana and Varela's autopoiesis, and Lovelock's Gaian view each attempt to describe the self-organizing, emergent quality of life that speaks, that has the power to elicit from us a *patient* regard for its being. Awakening to the phenomenological quality of this reciprocal relationality opens one to an entire field of relations between humans and the larger living world. We become attuned to these relations in our personal experience. It is in this sense we can, as Matt says, "disrespect the weather and the conditions;" it is when we deny the self-emergent, self-concealing, autopoietic qualities of the more than human world.

Matt's writers notebook entry points directly to our culture's relationship with technology. About the crew of the *Ryan's Commander* he writes, "They put a lot of faith in their technology…" These words are particularly interesting. Heidegger explicated the ontological status of nature in a technological world. Under the rule of a technological relation to the world, "nature becomes a giant gasoline station, an energy source for modern technology and industry" (Heidegger, 1966, p. 50). The living world, in a technological ontology, becomes a resource, a standing reserve, an inventory (*das Bestand*), as Heidegger called it, and within this ontological ground, nature is neither near, nor does it speak to us and demand our respect and patience. And if the living world no longer speaks, it is because this technological relation conceals its meaning. The ocean, the wind, the waves, the weather, are servants to technology. The self-emergent, autopoietic being of things is degraded and dominated, controlled and put into order by humans. Matt picks up on this with his admonition, "You can't control the weather, and you certainly can't control the sea." As a mode of revealing then, technology does not allow beings to spontaneously show themselves in accordance with their own internal demands, their own rhythms of merging, but rather we force and challenge them forth. It was the "Commander" that would set forth in a hurricane, the weather being a nuisance, a bother to be challenged and overcome.

The "Ryan's Commander" was a vessel fishing for snow crab – an animal that has evolved over eons to become a self-organizing and complex species adapted perfectly to its environment. In the past decade it has become a major "resource," a commodity harvested to fill lucrative markets in the United States. The essential being of the species is lost as it becomes commodified and resource-ified. Albert Borgmann (1984) added to Heidegger's views the notion that resources are themselves refined into, or disclosed as, technological devices. A device, in turn, divides internally between a machinery aspect and a commodity aspect. Borgmann defines a device very broadly. He writes that as a device an "animal is seen as a machine that produces as much meat and whichever of its functions fails to serve that purpose is indifferent or bothersome" (Borgmann, 1984, p. 192). In the snow crab fishery each year there is an outcry about the soft shell "problem." Upon first hearing of this complaint I assumed a disease was afflicting the crab making them unmarketable. It turned out that the problem of soft shell is the natural molting process of growth and re-generation as the species loses its old shell and replaces it with a new, soft shell. This 'inconvenient' habit of the crab pushes "deadlines."

Fishers must go further to catch their quota and precious time is lost increasing the "pressure and stress" of which Matt writes.

The fishing "industry" is governed by labyrinthine regulations in scientifically coded fishing zones indicated by abstract lines drawn on a map severing the living ocean ecosystems from any reality outside the technological economization that subsumes and conceals all. It is common to hear "industry officials" complain when a fishery is closed prematurely, "we still have three million dollars of product left in the water." The aim in a technologized, economized reality, as Wendell Berry (1986) comments, "is to separate us as far as possible from the sources of life" (p. 138). The pattern of commodification and technology as Heidegger remarked "devastates" and "exhausts" the Earth. As with the northern cod and in light of recent warnings about plummeting snow crab populations (FRCC, 2005, p. 33) this mode of relating to the Earth, that violently insists that the Earth make itself wholly available and extractable without rest, robs it of its capacity to withdraw back into itself, that is its nourishing mystery and so, it exhausts itself.

It is this, then, that foreshadows and fosters death and suffering. Matt's entry reveals the need for patience in the face of immature impatience fuelled by technology and economization. The ceaseless expansion of million dollar boats, more efficient processing equipment, bigger holds in which to store more catch, in the aim of maximizing profit, necessitates a deep dissatisfaction and impatience that negates the dignity of the Other and conceals our own membership in the community of living beings. It denies being patient *with*, a patience that recognizes the voice and self-organizing capacity of the ocean environment. It seems that it is to this deeply felt violation that Matt may be pointing when he writes, "It just isn't right; *something* is wrong."

As the word patience is born out of suffering and pain, our lack of forbearance ends in death and ultimately suffering. Matt is concerned, aroused and awakened to the "disrespect we show for the weather…for the ocean." It is interesting to recover the word *respect* and see that it is ultimately the same word as *respite* (Ayto, 2001). Respite refers to reprieve, rest, refuge—a letting be. Perhaps it is in this sense we can care for the ocean, to turn it over to its own possibilities, rather than demanding only its availability for our insatiable claims on it. In our patience we use what sustains and nourishes us, but we also cultivate and tend, attend; instead of exploiting we preserve and honour the ocean's mutually conditioning qualities of sustaining and self-concealment.

Emily

"Toward a silent core of waiting…"

Matt's coming to an awareness that patience is a stance with which we should orient ourselves to the more than human, echoes Emily's entry, but in another sense:

> I was born and raised in this place. I know most of the customs here. As spring and summer approach, when the sun is melting the last of the snow the harbour of my little town starts to fill with fishing boats from all over Newfoundland and Canada. I myself have never really paid much attention to the people that live their lives upon the sea. Mainly because during spring I'm in school, during summer I am in Cadet camp. But last summer my friend and I went down to the wharf. She said there were a lot of people tied up there. I was surprised to find a twelve-year-old boy that worked on the boats. He told me he worked there all summer fishing for mackerel. I don't know the name of the boat or where they were from. It wasn't a large boat but it was red with a deep blue railing. He was friendly but serious about his work.
>
> They were in the harbour for about two weeks –going out and coming in with mackerel for the plant. Sometimes they would get a lot but other times there would hardly be any. They had to tie up for three days just because the engine needed a part that they couldn't get here. But he never seemed bored or upset. It was like, "That's just the way it

> is." He seemed like he was always waiting; waiting to go out, waiting for the part, waiting for the plant, waiting for the wind, waiting for inspectors, waiting for the mackerel. But he seemed to not mind it, he was always doing something. I was surprised to find a twelve-year-old boy living like this. Now that the summer has ended there are no boats in the harbour and I find myself thinking about that boy. Will he be back? Is he still risking his life on the sea for money? A long winter awaits me and I'll wait too and watch the sea waiting for when the boats will fill the harbour once again.

Emily's entry is imbued with a passage of time, of being 'out of time', out of another era. The appearance of a twelve-year-old boy working on a fishing boat surprises her. There is the definite sense that the boat being described is not equipped with the latest technology; it is a smaller, simpler vessel. Without the latest navigational and weather tracking aids people must rely on other means to predict the conditions. There is a closer contact with the elements rather than attending to blips on an illuminated screen; we must turn our faces to the sky, sense the freshening wind, attune ourselves to a world alive with signs that speak. The poet Adrienne Rich (1981) writes,

> The glass has been falling all afternoon,
> And knowing better than the instrument
> What winds are walking overhead, what zone
> Of gray unrest is moving across the land,
> I leave the book upon a pillowed chair
> And walk from window to closed window, watching
> Boughs strain against the sky (p. 17)

There is the sense here of attunement to a sensate reciprocity that is more primordial, a participatory mode of perception. It is finer, a Gendlinian "vague but more precise" quality, richer, deeper than what can be mediated through technology. The poet paces, from window to window, knowing, sensing that which, she describes later in the poem, "Moves inward toward a silent core of waiting…" There is a patient acceptance of a bodily inherence, of delicate sensibilities, attuned to an animate Earth.

Emily describes the waiting involved in this small family fishing effort, "waiting to go out, waiting for the part, waiting for the mackerel, waiting for the wind…" Without technology the need for patience and respect is evident. Is patience and respect necessarily lost when con-tact is given over to technology? Lamenting what is lost to technology doesn't mean we should eliminate technology. Working on the ocean has been made immeasurably safer and more comfortable by technology. Problematizing our relationship with technology can, however, help to brace against it and afford some space in which we may question its current pattern and reclaim it as an "artful serving of all life" (Fisher, 2002, p. 156). Technology can be reclaimed to assist in the restrained and respectful use of the life communities to which we belong and rely on to sustain us.

Emily's subject, the twelve-year-old visitor to her village, "is never bored or upset." He is not impatient, but actively engaged, "friendly but serious about his work," in bodily-felt con-tact with the life-giving traditions of fishing. There is a vigorous, enduring quality to his waiting. His patience is imbued with strength and vitality, a quiet forbearance and contentment that seem rare, almost antiquated today. Emily points out, … "he is always doing something"; he is engaged in the present, in the matrix of relations and interactions that is his existence. Something touches Emily deeply about the boy, "the summer has ended… and I find myself thinking about that boy, will he be back?" Is it that she is struck by a child so engaged, so in con-tact? She, too, by coming in contact with the boy is in touch with a world she admits she knows little about. Her reflection and writing indicates a new meaning and an attunement that is new for her. She has been affected, implicitly, but through her writing has symbolized how she has been touched, and in this sense makes explicit contact. Her notebook entry offers an expressive voice for making contact. Emily's entry concludes that she, too, will wait and watch, "And I'll wait too and watch the sea waiting for the boats…"; an emergent patience, an awareness of, a responsiveness to, a sensibility for, the unfolding of the seasons, and the rhythms of tide and time.

Chapter 10: Realizing

Lost, unhappy and at home

Sarah

Earlier, I said the writers notebooks were organized with the aim of attending to how the students lived within their places. The notebooks are a repository of insights, observations, and feelings that implied and eventually launched future pieces of writing. Sarah crafted a poignant narrative about a girl who, over her young life, must repeatedly say good-bye to a father working far away. The young narrator harbours a secret dread each time her father leaves that it may be the last time she will see him. The narrator's prescience is realized at the end of the story when the news of a mining accident shatters the young girl's life. Sarah's notebook entry, from which she wrote to launch her story, came out of a writing prompt that asked the students to look carefully around their communities, to see with new eyes, the familiar and the easily recognizable. Sarah wrote;

> I think a lot about the way things used to be when families could support themselves in their communities. Even in my short life time things have changed so much; most of what I see around here now are quickly becoming museum pieces to a way of life that no longer exists. Overturned boats, stages and wharves that crumble with each passing season, shed and twine lofts that are falling down. It all has to do with the down turn in the fishery. Parents must work in far-flung places and our families face special challenges. I know about this first hand.
>
> My father just returned to the North West Territories after his short time home. Each time he has to return it gets more difficult to leave his family behind and for us to see him go. He missed so many events over the years, first Holy Communions, graduations, birthdays, and anniversaries. I was very young when my father went to work in the NWT but I have one vivid memory. I remember that his flight was leaving very early one morning and I was still in bed while he was getting ready to leave. I was very

> young and my father didn't want to wake me to say good bye. So he crept into my room, kissed me on the head and left. I am guessing that he did not know I was awake, but after he left the room I began to cry.
>
> People here are tied to their roots; they hate leaving this place for other places to work. But in order to survive they must leave—they have no choice. They may leave but they will always come back. My mom works so we have stayed, but so many of my friends and relatives have moved away. It is easier in a big city, more job opportunities, fathers can live at home. I wish mine could, but I know he loves coming back during his time off. It's what keeps him going back North—knowing that he can come again to this house and this cove.

Sarah, and several other students, wrote about a sense of "at-homeness" and the paradoxical condition of deep despair and profound loneliness, in a sense, the homesickness they feel while living at home. It was this realizing, the apprehending with greater clearness and detail, that emerged as a second theme.

"Lost, unhappy and at home," is how the Irish poet Seamus Heaney felt when he visited an ancient burial site in Denmark (Chamberlin, 2003, p. 74). The bodies, remarkably well preserved by acidity and water logging and by an embalming shroud of dead plant matter, show signs of ritual sacrifice and murder. Heaney draws a parallel between the bog people with the violence tearing apart his native Northern Ireland. The line, "Lost, unhappy and at home," from Heaney reminded me of the sense that emerged in the notebook entries—a feeling of being troubled, disturbed, angry and, at the same time, at home. The word *home* is rich and deep in its emotional connections and connotations. Yet, there is a rawness, a sense of impending fear, finality and fatalism evident in many students' entries concerning the fate of their homes.

A full range of meanings are evident from the word *home* as the house, the dwelling place, to *home* as the feeling, the conditions and circumstances surrounding the place of our dwelling. But most often, the student entries describe the place to which they "belong," a place that they, or their parents love, and describe with deep emotional attachment. Sarah writes with a confidence born of experience, "People here are tied to their roots; they hate leaving this place for other places to work." Paradoxically, it is the idea of home that keeps her father "going back North." In leaving, there is the knowledge "that he can come back home again to this house in this cove."

The idea of home has always been fraught with contradiction. The ideal, the utopia ceases to exist, and lives most realistically in the imagination. Home. Here and nowhere. It is tied to our history and our hope, to the past and the future. It is who we are and where we belong. Home, and all that it is, evokes its actual meaning and its metaphorical reverberations. It is subtle in its expression and transcends whatever we might make of it. Home both constrains and frees us. The sense of home that emerges out of the students' entries does not seem tied to any mythical, imaginary, utopia—rather it echoes the realizing of deep sorrow and loss. There is also undeniable fear, and even resentment. Is it possible to be haunted by homelessness while at home? Can we resent "home" for its inability to live up to the utopian ideal often projected upon it? How is it possible to be seemingly homesick while at home? Many of the students' writers notebook entries seem to relate the realization of just this kind of home-lessness.

Robbie

Robbie takes a walk on a November evening and is struck by a haunting sense of desolation that might be characterized as homelessness. It is a feeling that haunts us all, that averts my eyes from a homeless man lingering in a doorway—I cannot face that which I fear so deeply and viscerally—to be without a home.

It is a chilly November night, so cold I can see my breath. The first thing I notice is the wind; I can hear it rustling the dead leaves of the autumn trees. I look around for signs of life but there is no one around.

I see my friend's Quad[1] parked by my bridge. The leather seat is lined with frost. I can see the garbage box; the wind continues to howl. The wood is stacked neatly by the fence ready to burn in the woodstove. The ends are gray from age. I hear a dog barking off somewhere in the cove. A different dog answers the first.

Most of the houses seem abandoned and too many actually are. In some a television flickers behind the curtains. I see the playground, the swings blow forlornly. I sense that this town, my town is slowly dying.

I think about all the people who have had to leave for the mainland. Just last week my friend Chantel had to move because her mom couldn't find a job. When I was younger before the cod moratorium the town was alive with people. There were always people in the playground. There was no shortage of money. There wasn't this feeling of loneliness. After the moratorium people just kept leaving; the town getting smaller and smaller. I know it will never be the same again. There is a loneliness eating away at me now. It seems to be always there; especially when I hear someone else is packing up. You can feel it in the pit of your stomach. Something is wrong. I retrace my steps past the empty park, past the lifeless homes. A single snowflake falls. Yet another reminder of how this village is shrinking. Finally I reach my home knowing there is warmth inside. I open the door and I can feel the heat. Home at last!

[1] *Quad : a four wheeled all-terrain vehicle*

Robbie describes a profound loneliness. Robbie's felt sense is telling him the displacement of people, the destruction of their livelihood, culture, patterns of living, the whole network of relationship and support is fundamentally unjust.

The "packing up" of a family member in Sarah's entry is one version of leaving home; the collective leaving described by Robbie is another. It might be described as the story of exile or Diaspora, a scattering or dispersion of people – economic or ecological refugees seeking a better life elsewhere. According to the most recent census information, the five communities represented by the children in this study have lost 29.4% of their people in the ten years between 1991 and 2001 (Statistics Canada, 2001, pp. 1-7). The census to be carried out in 2006 is expected to show even greater evidence of what has been called by government officials and statisticians as "out migration." The rather innocuous term "migration," of moving from one place to another, or even the periodical and temporary movement, as in birds or animals, conceals the deep pain and suffering imposed on people forced to leave. Rather, the dispersion is a story of dis-location and dis-possession and a story all too common in struggles throughout the world.

Gary Paul Nabham, a scholar of ethno-botany and a Lebanese -American, beautifully captures the literal and figurative dimensions of home and homelessness when he describes a chunk of pale dolomite that sits on his desk. The rock came from his grandmother's house that once stood in the Bekaa Valley of Lebanon. He writes, "Like a stone that now rests on my desk, my grandmother was displaced from her region of origin" (Nabham, 2004, p. 18). He relates the story of his grandmother's forced exile. Nabham says that by some counts, political and economic refugees uprooted from their homelands now number two billion. "Where ever you travel in the world, it is likely that one out of three people whose paths you cross are fleeing or have fled their mother country" (2004, p. 20). He calls these people "cultural orphans" uprooted from their dynamic cultural enmeshments, from the places that nurtured their environmental sensibilities and ethics (2004, p. 20). Nabham believes that people have a right, if they choose to do so, to celebrate their own distinctive sense of place, not in exile, but at home alongside neighbours, friends and family.

The fear of being up-rooted is unsettling and manifests itself as worry, dis-quiet and unease. This is in contrast to what *home* usually represents. It is this lack, the absence of peace, security, contentment that becomes more obvious in the student entries. Robbie reaches his house and the warmth inside with a relieved, "Home at last." It is as if what he has seen of other's homes ("I retrace my steps past… the lifeless homes") creates a deeper sense of connection for the refuge offered by his own.

Mark

Mark, like Sarah, writes about his father, a man who desperately seeks to nurture and preserve, if not create, a peace and contentment on his short furloughs home.

> It's Sunday morning in my home. The sun shines though the large bay window. Looking out the window I see the bay gleaming in the distance under the sun. A single road winds through the trees toward the bay. The scene remains the same as it has for years.
>
> Despite how people have changed on the outside world; the news of declining faith in religious institutions, I see many people driving off to church. Their beliefs are unfazed as many people, like my parents, were strict and depended on these beliefs in hard times. The air this morning is cold and wood smoke hangs heavy. Surrounded by coniferous forests the people use the trees, burning wood to heat their homes . Some things haven't changed much.
>
> My dad walks to the stereo behind me. Every Sunday morning he plays traditional Newfoundland music; like "Saltwater Joys" which I have probably heard a thousand times now. One line goes, "This island that we cling to has been handed down with pride, By folks who fought to live here, taking hardship all in stride, So I'll compliment her beauty, hold on to my good-byes, Stay and take my chances with those salt water joys"
>
> The words probably don't mean much to an outsider but hold great meaning for my dad and for me. Dozens of time we have been faced with the threat of having to leave the island in search of work. Instead my father chose a job that takes him away from home, far out into the ocean for weeks at a time. He has been all over the world and was last working in the Gulf of Mexico, but he is never happier than when he's home, cooking dinner, the same every Sunday, salt meat and vegetables, listening to his Newfoundland music on a Sunday morning.

> On our living room wall is a painting of the harbour where my mom grew up. It depicts a more prosperous time in the small village. The people relied on the water for their living. My uncle's stage looks busy and alive. But now when you go there the stage planks have long since rotted, long abandoned. The painting freezes the memories of better days in people's minds, a lot like the music and words now playing.
>
> I think. Why all this sadness and longing? Did it have to be this way? Couldn't people have continued with their traditional lifestyles? They weren't rich but somehow they seemed happy. I don't even think it is the 'good old days' thing where people romanticize the past. Oh I know we have more conveniences and modern technology has made life easier, but when I think of my family and relatives I wonder if it has made life better?

Mark describes a painting of a harbour that hangs in his living room as depicting a happier place of refuge and peace. It is a sense of place his father tries to preserve in his adherence to ritual and tradition. He cooks the same meal, listens to traditional music and is "never more happier" doing so. Place and peace – the two words have a semantie overlap, a resonance. The English word, peace, pronounced in Middle English as *pais*, harkens the Spanish word for place (pais) and in French (pays). More to the point, if a person feels secure, content, at-home in place, he or she is likely to feel at peace. So, too, those forced to leave their homes unwillingly, forced to "survive" by leaving, may be unable to see the beauty of their adopted places, as they pine for what is lost, what was left behind. Mark's entry opens our eyes and ears to the imagery and the rhythm of language that celebrates his father's deep connection to place. However, his words also serve as a reminder and a warning of the consequences of dis-allowing and dis-connecting people from the myriad connections in which they are nested and the suffering that ensues.

In a similar way we will see David's entry also touches on a profound loneliness that arises out of a dis-connection from place, of being "Lost, unhappy and at home." He is overcome by the emptiness and the desperation that results when families are broken, when their sense of identity and connectedness is fragmented and cannot be made whole through infrequent and all too short visits that curb and stunt the nurturing of sustaining relationships with people and place. David's entry points to the difference between mere 'surviving' and living fully, peacefully and contentedly in place.

Michelle

Michelle, as well as other students, locates the profound sense of loss in an estrangement and an alienation that widens and makes the losses all the more troubling, destructive and poignantly felt. Through her use of metaphor and symbol, Michelle beautifully concretizes and brings nearer the connections to her surroundings. Metaphor, as Ricoeur points out, "makes us see things." It carries us along with it, presenting the abstract in concrete terms. Michelle uses the symbol of fishing stages with missing walkways. The wooden structures that connect them to the beaches were swept away leaving the fishing stages, the ubiquitous and busy rough-hewn structures for preparing fish, as islands isolated and vulnerable in the face of the unrelenting elements. Their fate is sealed. Michelle writes, "They are just there collapsing, cut off from the beach – islands slowly disappearing. They are like little symbols of what is happening to this place." Her symbol, her metaphor, makes things visible, alive, actual as it awakens the imagination and emotion. It enables us "to see." It allows, as Nussbaum writes, "to see one thing as another, to endow and perceive form with a complex life" (1995, p. 5). Michelle writes:

I walk out through my door and down a step onto my bridge[1]. The cold air makes the steam rise from the water in the cove up into the sky. The water is so calm, hardly a ripple to be seen. The reflections of the hills makes everything seem so peaceful. The grass around the bridge is covered sparkly white with frost from last night. I watch the wood smoke rise from the chimneys into the sky. In front of each house is a woodpile- some are covered with orange tarps and tied to keep the rain off. Around my house are some lots of land that recently had houses but they have since been cleared. The houses were a sign when this cove was at its peak, during the years of fishing and mining. Now all that remains are the tracks of the dump trucks and the machines used to destroy the homes.

I squint to shield my eyes from the brilliant sun and through the rising mist across the harbour I can see the Government wharf. It consists of two parts; one part has a crane to unload boats and light to warn of the wharf's presence. The other part contains our fish plant. The building is in use about two months of the year. The wharf under the plant is rotting. Only a few sticks keep the stage from collapsing. The few fishermen that remain are planning on having it torn down. To the left of the Government wharf are stages owned by people in the cove. Some of the stages don't even have a walk anymore. They are just there collapsing cut off from the beach- island slowly disappearing. They are like little symbols of what's happening to this place. Since the fishery closed many of the people owning these stages have left the Cove. Others have lost interest and simply don't maintain them.

The town slipway[2] is in similar condition. It can't be used anymore. Overtime the "slip" has washed out and has not been repaired. Most of the boats on the slip are old and rotten. They are overturned to keep snow from splitting them apart in winter. Several haven't been pushed off in years.

This place has a population of around a thousand but now it is barely four hundred. I glance around the cove and I see a real sign of the times – our school which closed a few years ago is being converted to an old people's home. As I stand here I ask why? This is a big question with so many different answers that I am mostly confused. The fishery is changed – big boats; big plants, it's like time has passed us by. But things got too big too fast. I know it wasn't perfect in the past but at least people could live, work and raise their families here. Not so now. I see the sun and I know the future of this place may still rely on the sea. We have the best sunsets on the island; we have icebergs and whales. Tourists are coming here more each year. But somehow I sense it will not be enough.

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[1] *bridge- a small deck or raised patio with steps*

[2] *slipway- a wooden ladder- like structure built laid on a beach on which boats are pulled up for storage and maintenance*

Michelle's entry echoes the realization of other students. In Robbie's entry, he points to a cause for the profound loneliness, the "shrinking" of his town. "When I was younger, before the cod moratorium, the town was alive with people," he writes. Sarah, too, points to a similar connection, " Overturned boats, stages and wharves that crumble with each passing season… It all has to do with the downturn in the fishery." Mark also alludes to the technological pattern and its effect on his life and on the Earth. "Oh I know we have more conveniences and modern technology has made life easier, but when I think of my family and relatives I wonder, if it has made life better." And in the entry above, Michelle is distraught with the signs of decline and decay.

David

But it is David, in his concise, matter of fact style, who is most able to point to the underlying dynamics he feels are responsible for the pain, loss and suffering.

> It's my father's last day at home again, his bags are packed and he's ready to go. I've lived this moment everyday for as long as I can remember, undoubtedly along with hundreds of other Newfoundlanders around this province. Since I was an infant my father worked far away from home for weeks, then returned for a short time just to go back to work again. Having started a new job in Labrador, my father is hardly at home now. He leaves for a month just to return home for seven days. Life at home during his absence isn't necessarily difficult, but it is without a doubt more lonely. With the recent passing of our dog, and my mom working quite a lot, I often return home from school to a house that is eerily quiet and lonely.
>
> My sister is already gone and I will be going to post secondary school too so it will have quite an impact on my mother. The economy of our community makes it impossible for my father to find work at home. I know many people who are faced with the same situation. I often wonder what it would be like to have a 'normal' family life with a dad that comes home from work every day. But that's not the reality of this place anymore. The beginning of the end occurred when one link in the chain was broken – the fishery collapsed due to our mismanagement and greed and now everything else is affected. I take my dad's bags to the car for another trip to the airport. It doesn't get any easier but everyone must do what they can to survive.

David writes, “ The beginning of the end occurred when one link in the chain was broken – the fishery collapsed due to our mismanagement and greed and now everything else is affected.” His metaphor, too, makes visible, for him and us, the interconnections, the embeddedness that is at the heart of our relationship with the Earth. David describes the alienation caused by technologizing and rationalizing a fishery that sustained these same communities through generations. His resentment is palpable. He is angry because he, his mother, father, sister and community suffer due to a greed and ignorance that exhausts the ocean eco-system on which his community depends for sustenance. David’s voice is of one who *judges* the actions of others. His charge is “greed” and “mismanagement.”

Simon Weil says;

> Justice consists in seeing that no harm is done to anyone. Whenever anyone cries inwardly, “Why am I being hurt?” harm is being done to that person. The cry raises quite different problems, for which the spirit of truth, justice and love is indispensable.” (Primavesi, 2000, p. 72)

David’s entry elicits such a cry. He points directly to a “link in the chain” that has been broken, the collapse of the northern cod fishery. Michael Harris (1999) wrote a penetrating analysis of the historical events leading up to the closure of the fishery in 1992 in his book titled, *Lament for an Ocean.* He writes, using language similar to David’s;

> the destruction of the northern cod was not a one act play, but a pageant of greed that went on for decades before the curtain finally came down. At every step of the way Cassandra wailed but no one listened. (p. 65)

David, and the other children in my class, live in a region once home to the greatest biomass on the planet. The plankton-rich waters of the North Atlantic were renown for the incredible diversity and number of fish species found there. The shoals of the continental shelf, the Grand Banks, are an affirmation of the life generating power of the Earth, however, they have also become a symbol of denial of our interconnectivity as we pillaged a natural gift of unimaginable abundance with unfettered violence, greed and disdain.

Harris' research points to the "black magic of technology" for making "a desert of the sea" (1999, p. 64). Drs. Jeffrey Hutchings and Ransom Myers, two of Canada's top fishery scientists, have estimated that 8 million tonnes of northern cod were caught between 1500 and 1750, representing twenty-five to forty cod generations, which were able to adapt to growing fishery pressures. By comparison, another 8 million tonnes were caught between 1960 and 1975, when there were two hundred high-tech factory freezer trawlers on the Grand Banks. That devastatingly short fifteen-year period encompassed one or two generations of cod, leaving no time for the species to adapt (Harris, 1999, pp. 65-77). The ocean has become for us what Heidegger called, a "standing reserve" in which all beings are leveled down to just so much extractable, transformable, exchangeable raw material. Our technology completely outstripped the living world's ability to re-generate and respond. It completely altered our view of the oceans and the abundance of life that teemed there; the "technological mode [of perceiving] degrades the being of things… by revealing them as mere fodder for the mega machine" (Fisher, 2002, p. 163).

The suffering now evident in communities, especially in children, is the result of the damage and pain that results in our denial of how deeply and inextricably immersed we are in the ecosystems we call home. David realizes a link has been broken and great harm being done. The decisions made and the warnings unheeded present a powerful description of judgment as present choice that is inseparably bound to future consequences. It connects our life style, choices and decisions with their effects on the life sustaining systems on which our children and future generations depend. Our enmeshment, our 'structural coupling' with the living Earth means a future partially shaped by what we do today.

As Simon Weil believes, justice is done, or will be judged to be done, where no harm, no violence has been done. Or, more realistically, where we have tried, to the best of our ability, to be just and to do justice to every living thing. The great American conservationist, Aldo Leopold, proposed a land ethic to guide our relationship with the living world. "All ethics so far evolved," he wrote, "rest upon a single premise; that the individual is a member of a community of interdependent parts. The land ethic simply enlarges the community to include soils, waters, plants and animals… it affirms their right to continued existence in a natural state" (1966, pp. 239, 240). These words are grounds for hope as well as fear, for they emphasize our freedom to do no harm to others, or at least minimize that harm. It involves each of us in the process of justice-making through a transformative effort to shape an ecological consciousness, to nurture an ecological sensibility, and to become aware and attuned to our ecological selves. The hope contained in the setting down of such an imperative is not a mere wish, or a dream, but must be a struggle for justice. It must be a struggle for justice taken up with the tacit assumption that today's struggle will bring something better tomorrow. This hope relies on an understanding of ourselves as members of communities engaged in the life-forwarding evolution of ideas, values, and shared environments. Alphonso Lingis (1999) writes:

> We are not simple intruders upon the eco-system that brought us forth, as it brought forth in interdependence its other animal and plant inhabitants, and to make a home for ourselves is not only, as Levinas wrote, to establish a retreat from the world of industry; it is also to live in relations of multiple symbiosis with the land, the plants, and the animals….[O]ur children impose upon us *what we have to do* over a long range, perhaps even our whole life. We neither invent these imperatives nor receive them from other legislating minds. (emphasis in original, p. 397)

If, as according to Lingis, we do not invent, or receive the imperative from others, then it would seem the responsibility is with the individual to address fearlessly, intelligently and imaginatively the powerful and unjust political, financial, economic and religious processes within communities that are allied against the "life-economy" (McMurtry, 2002, p. 117). It is to Weil's spirit of "truth, justice and love" we must turn in our efforts to address the judgment contained in the voices of children like David. Judgment on us as justice-making individuals, or as societies, will include the efforts to improve the world we leave to individuals, communities and species that will come after us.

It is language, metaphor, and our expressive powers that allow the cry, the judgment to be heard. Weil (1957) writes, "If you say to someone who has ears to hear, 'What you are doing to me is not just,' you may touch and awaken at its source the spirit of attention and love" (p. 38). With these words Weil underlines the importance of the social, the imaginative, interpersonal and emotional dimensions of our response to other living beings. They are a part of us, integral to our connective relationships, through our structural coupling with the larger living Earth. They are dimensions of the responsive relationality, our inextricable embeddedness in a total field of relations. Our lives are braided, nested or knotted in this field of intricate relations and justice will be realized when we attend to as many of these knots as possible. Weil emphasizes the role of emotion in a just response. The "spirit of attention' encompasses our expressive powers of language, writing, and literature and our response to that literature, or art, or music. They all enable us to hear the voices of children deeply afflicted, affected and troubled, voices often silenced, voices to which we, as a culture, rarely attend.

Chapter 11: Advancing

As the research project unfolded, it became apparent that some students were indeed addressing sensitively in their entries connections of body, mind and spirit. They seemed to be moving beyond nurturing and awakening ecological awareness and moving forward, furthering, *advancing* their understanding of subtle interrelationships in complex and interesting ways. So, too, the student writing at this stage opened for me lines of inquiry that problematized, and thereby deepened, my understanding of a truly relational consciousness as revealed through a reciprocal arrangement with the living Earth.

Tony

The nature of *gift*

Fishing is the main source of food and income for the residents of rural Newfoundland. For so many years we have taken for granted what the sea and its many gifts mean to us. There are so many memories that I have of being on the water with my dad. I never considered that these days could come to an end.

I remember this one fishing trip I took when I was 13. It was the last crab trip of the year for my dad's crew and he asked if I would like to go along. I was very excited and said "yes" right away.

Before the trip began we had to stack crab pots that were iron framed covered on bright orange line at the stern of the ship. As we left port the strong smell of ocean salt tinged my nose. I stood on deck and watched the bright red sky glowing over the calm, dark water.

I remember the mouth watering taste of crab and lobster that filled the crew and put us to sleep. But sleep did not come often because we were always on watch. If that didn't keep you awake, the pounding waves and roaring engine was the cause. There was always the feeling that you had to be so careful; weather reports, coast guard calls, checking charts and GPS; always listening to the engine for just the right sound

Early the next morning we reached the fishing grounds, and I was greeted on deck by the rest of the crew. Filling the pots with bait and hauling in the rope were my daily duties. The cool, crisp air allowed me to see my words as I talked and laughed with the rest of the crew.

That day I saw so much, schools of porpoises surrounded the boat and huge whales fed and waved their massive tails. Like us, they too were depending on the gifts of the sea.

On coffee breaks the crew told me stories about how the fish were so plentiful years ago. I wish I could have seen it. They talked about cod that were so big and traps that were bursting. And I think perhaps we've taken more than our share; that the huge trawlers with their technology is more than was ever meant to be. Listening to them I feel sad and cheated, something deep inside of me feels missing because I won't see that ever again.

The moon was full by the time we reached port and the cling clang of the lighthouse bell informed us that we were home again. We did get that last bit of crab left on the quota and it is a trip I will never forget.

Many of Tony's observations echo the poet Gary Snyder's words when he writes of a "celebration of the gift-exchange quality of our give and take" (1990, p.19). What is my experience of the "gift-exchange quality" of which Snyder speaks and to which Tony alludes? On one level to understand that we take from, we depend on, the Earth for survival seems obvious. But what is the experience of the exchange? In what way do I give? What does it mean to say, as Tony does, "the sea and its gifts?" How do I experience life as a gift? What gives? What, in essence, is given?

The idea of 'gift' has become a subject of extensive anthropological, philosophical, theological and cultural debate (Derrida, 1995; Mauss, 1997; Schrift, 1997; Godelier, 1999; Primavesi, 2003; Wyschogrod et. al, 2002). Marcel Mauss (1997) traces the etymology of the word "Gift" to the archaic German where the word once meant both 'present' and 'poison.' The word's reference to 'present,' or the bestowing of life, persisted in *Gift und Gabe* (presents), but has now has fallen out of usage. The German word *Gift* is usually translated into English as 'poison' or 'malice.' Mauss traces this dual referent to 'present' and 'poison' back to ancient German and Scandinavian 'drink-presents' where the possibility always existed the drink could be poison. The giver's intention was unknown and anxiety, uncertainty and suspicion accompanied the offering (Mauss, 1997, p. 30). This macabre history reveals the relationality inherent in any gift. The phenomenology of the gift-exchange is rich in its complex interactions between donor, gift and receiver. Each gift-exchange is a unique event, and phenomenally, can be as different as an exchange of words. Adriaan Peperzak (2002) states,

> The activity of giving belongs to a group of activities that presuppose a subject, a dative, and a direct object; a giver gives a gift to someone who, through this giving I, is invited (asked, urged, demanded, forced) to receive the gift. Another example of such activities is speaking; someone, the speaker, says something to a listener. (p. 164)

It is to be expected then that from such an infinity of possibilities and 'events;' the word 'gift' carries with it an infinity of subtle nuances depending on the situation. The relationship between giver and receiver and gift, link them "openly, materially, sensually, with the link made tangible (usually) when some object is passed by one to the other, chosen by one for the other and received by the other" (Primavesi, 2000, p. 156). There is also evident in the gift-exchange the linking of people as family members, with emotional or sexual ties, or perhaps in business or economic relationships. We can think of common gift-exchange experiences with friends, family, lovers, the 'free' gift with a magazine subscription. An a priori relationship is implied. That is why strangers bearing gifts arouse suspicion. The comedian passing out five-dollar bills to unsuspecting passersby on a busy street is met with stares of incredulity by some and, occasionally, with outright rejection, but he is most often met with looks that say, "What's the catch?"

What is the essential character of gift-exchange? Is the donor constitutive of all giving? In other words, is it essentially about the giver, the person doing the giving? What about the recipient? On whom or what can I bestow a gift? Can I "give" a plant a drink, a rusting bicycle some much needed oil, a school library new books? What about the giver? Cannot the giver, too, be many things? The sun, trees, animals, the sea give, but also unknown or mysterious forces, Mother Nature, Fortune, God or gods, culture, and the World can be experienced or imagined as givers. Peperzak (2002) says, "Giving without a giver is not possible, but the giver might remain hidden, unknown, indeterminable forever" (p. 165).

What about *how* a gift is given? The situation? The circumstances? The motivations? Can we assume whatever is given is given freely? Unlike the 'free' gift with the magazine subscription, an authentic gift-exchange is not expected to give return to the giver. Some post structuralist philosophers argue about the impossibility of giving, believing that giving is inevitably trapped in ultimately self-centered exchange. Giving, or genuine generosity cannot exist because it is destroyed or cancelled out by gratitude or the self-satisfaction of the giver (Bernasconi, 1997). This post structuralist search for 'pure' generosity leads us to an extreme position that negates the existence of altruism and charity. As a human experience we do not need to be pre-occupied with either pole of the giving continuum—either 'pure' untainted generosity, or no giving that is not a form of egoism. In our everyday lives we experience the gift-exchange as a unique phenomenon, and when we stay with the experience perceptible shifts in relations between the giver and receiver emerge. My neighbour has been baking and comes to my door with a beautiful blueberry pie. In doing so she bestows something on me that I lack. When I take the pie the perceived lack is remedied. Immediately, I am struck with gratitude and a desperate need to reciprocate. What can I give her? What does she need? Oddly, I feel pressured and stressed. There is an imbalance that must be addressed for it creates a type of dependence or reliance on the generosity of my neighbour. Giving, and choosing to give what I lacked asserts my neighbour's in-dependence. I could have refused the gift as politely as possible. I could have responded, "No thank you, I am on a diet" or "I have pies in my freezer I have not eaten yet." Despite being a breach of etiquette this would not have changed the nature of the giving. The gift is in the giving; it does not matter if it is accepted, an unaccepted gift, an unacknowledged gift or an unreceived gift is as much a gift as one that is accepted. It is the intention that the gift will be accepted that seems to be at the core of the experience, not the actual acceptance.

When Tony points to our taking for granted the gifts of the sea and what these gifts mean to us he is pointing to a primary human experience of dependence. We are reminded by the Red Cross to "give the gift of life" for lives depend on our generosity. How, other than through my flesh and blood, can I give of myself? What is it that I give? And has not my 'self', my family history, culture, the fact that I was born, and live and enjoy all that sustains me been given to me? In a strange paradox it would seem I have been given to myself. But who has given me to me? Our lives depend on life being given, bestowed on us through a network of dependent/independent relationships down through our genealogy to a distant primordial human inheritance. Anne Primavesi (2000) asserts that on the basis of Gaia theory, this relationship can be traced "to the moment when the first living organism emerged from its Earth environment. It was that which 'gave' birth to the organism and then through inputs of energy, sustained its life" (p. 156).

Tony's entry simply and clearly advances the sense that great gifts are bestowed. But whether ingratitude, ungrateful thoughts, or obliviousness to the source of the endowment follows, the intention and structure of a genuine giving is not altered. Tony's entry is imbued with a sense of the gift of life. His writing highlights that our lives are still ultimately characterized by dependence. Always already life is constituted by prior and present gifts that create who we are. Present to us in Tony's entry is the network of relations, the gifts that presuppose an enmeshment in the lives of other people and with other organisms, with the air we breathe and the land we walk, with the food we eat and water we drink. We are learning with increasing urgency that we cannot take the giving for granted. We are being challenged to acknowledge the 'giver,' the source that has remained historically concealed in Western thinking for too long. We are learning scientifically, socially and spiritually that the reciprocal processes, what we *give* to nature affects what nature gives to us. We are, first and foremost, acting as givers/receivers in relation to Earth and its other living entities. As Tony points out we are learning, "we've taken more than our fair share" and are making too many demands on Earth's systems that upset the balance between life and death within these systems. This proves lethal for the ecosystem and results in suffering and ultimately death for us.

Jamie

Gifts met with gratitude

> There was a streak of water bursting out over the cliff. The water wasn't very deep and I could see the bottom. It was every shade of blue and green. The noise of the water plunging into the ocean was deafening. Dad was driving and he inched forward ever so slowly. Then he stuck the bow of the boat under the waterfall. My mom and my sister were sitting up there and they got drenched… I will always remember that day. I think about it often; about how much we have to be thankful for even though life can be so difficult around here. My aunts and uncles keep telling me and my sister to enjoy what we got now, that it is a gift that they didn't appreciate when they were growing up here when they were young. But the more I hear them talk I realize that what they say is true. That day was a gift for sure. It was what the old people call "a pet day."

Many students, like Jamie, express their gratefulness, a sense of gratitude. But for what are these students grateful? To be grateful implies that something has been given. Indeed, if I feel grateful, or thankful for what has been given, to whom or what do I direct my thanks? Who has bestowed the gift? Students draw on experiences that are recalled over other experiences that simply are not recalled. We remember some things and not others. In crafting anecdotes the writer values some things over others, since meaning cannot be made if all details are treated the same. The students choose what is important and in each entry reveal *them-selves* in relationship. Some aspect of givenness, which becomes important for that student, unites each student entry.

Jamie recounts a memorable day on the ocean surrounded by family and visiting relatives. His father plays a prank on the others by surreptitiously placing the bow of the boat under a small waterfall coursing down a cliff face and into the sea.

Jennifer, too, tells of an overnight boating trip with family to a special cove and wonderful beach. Tony describes crab fishing with his father and Jenille's grandparents take her to see capelin spawning on a beach. Unifying these memorable anecdotes is the sense, the awareness, that each experience was a gift to be met with gratitude. There was also present the inherent paradox in understanding life, or the land, or the sea as a gift. Some students tacitly understood these natural entities bring life to some, and death to others. As a class and community we had experienced the death of a classmate enjoying a swim on a summer day, and we had experienced the drowning of the crew of the *Ryan's Commander*, men pursuing their livelihood on the sea.

Stephanie

A wonderful, terrible place

Stephanie describes taking her snowmobile to a high cliff and from that vantage she surveys her village and its surroundings in a larger living field. It is described as a scene of great beauty and wonder, however there is an undeniable fear and terror welling below the surface.

> From up here the houses look extremely small and I realize how small everything really is. I can hear the wind in the spruce trees, some horns blow and the sound of snowmobiles racing back and forth. But it is insignificant compared to the huge night sky above me and the harbour that leads out to the immense black ocean. It is scary really. You cannot see anything but the roar tells you of the danger. There isn't any ice yet so the sound of water is by far the most distinctive. You can hear the water in the Rattles flowing down over the rocks and out into the harbour. The rush of invisible waves up on the shore…for a moment I think about death and people who have drowned on the water. But I feel happy just to take the time to appreciate it all. It is like God was apart of it all. We don't do this enough. Most people (me included) just stay in the house most nights while all of this goes on unnoticed – the beautiful lights, the wind in the trees, the immense blackness of the water – my little town – it's small and precious to me and on that night the most beautiful thing in the world.

What is being expressed in Stephanie's happiness and fear? Are these feelings antithetical? How can I feel truly happy and fearful at the same time? In what way do they co-exist in this situation? It seems unsettling that the great beauty of life as a gift is tied to the inherent paradoxical relation between life and death. It did not seem that long ago I sat in a small church mourning the death of a former student, a boy who loved life and lost it in pursuit of that love. The television images of an overturned fishing boat being mercilessly pounded by a roiling sea are all too fresh. The patterns of reciprocity, of exchange and relation, between life, death and the living world link memory and image inextricably. I know our life, ultimately, depends upon the Earth, as does our death. But what is my experience of this? The essential nature of this relationship has been humanity's great pre-occupation as our religious, philosophical, psychological, artistic and literary traditions have grappled with this basic truth of human existence. Walt Whitman writes in the poem "A Song of Myself";

> A child said *What is grass?* fetching it to me with
> full hands,
> How could I answer the child? I do not know any
> more than he…
> …I guess it is the handkerchief of the Lord,
> A scented gift and remembrancer divinely dropt…
> And now it seems to be the beautiful uncut hair of
> graves…
> This grass is very dark to be from the white heads
> of mothers…
> Dark to come from under the faint red roofs of
> mouths.

Cultural narratives from around the world seek to address the paradox of fear, death, isolation and alienation in a world on which we depend for life. This paradox becomes the basic struggle in the human condition and a spiritual pursuit. It contains a sense of the numinous dimension of our existence and a glimpse of the immense mystery that surrounds our being of awesome complexity. We live in relation. Our human existence is disclosed as a network of relations; our being is revealed, not by looking within where we may find it locked inside, but rather it is disclosed throughout the matrix of worldly interactions in which our being continually unfolds. In separating ourselves out of the network, the web of relations, as exempt in some way from the cycles and rhythms of life, we create the so-called "void" that haunts. We are haunted by "a sense of lack, emptiness, insecurity, or tenuousness" (Fisher, 2002, p. 97). Our fear of the void gets translated into (among other things), according to eco-psychologist Andy Fisher (2002), a fear of the natural world, the wild, the untamed, " a million creepy crawlies, microorganisms, or hidden beasts—alien and fearsome others" (p. 98). Paying attention to the media corroborates Fisher's observations as each year new "threats" unveil themselves, and are sensationalized in the media, from killer bees and avian flu to West Nile virus and Lyme disease, reinforcing a deep sense of fear and dread of the more than human world.

David Loy (1992) has suggested "the most fundamental dualism of all" (p. 172) is that between the separated or isolated self and the no-thing-ness, or void that perpetually threatens its existence. Gary Snyder (1990) sees Western philosophy and science taking the road of abject separation and setting up an endless struggle of separation between the human and the natural world. The thinking of Descartes, Newton, and Hobbes, says Snyder, was "a profound rejection of the organic world" (p. 19). It is their worldview that results in the ecological degradation we now face. However, according to Snyder, most of humanity has always taken another view;

> That is to say they have understood the play of the real world, with all its suffering, not in simple terms of "nature red in tooth and claw" but through a celebration of the gift-exchange quality of our give and take… To acknowledge that each of us at the table will eventually be part of the meal is not just being "realistic." It is allowing the sacred to enter and accepting the sacramental aspect of our temporary personal being. (1990, p. 19)

The grass is indeed "a scented gift" as Whitman writes, yet, it too, "is the beautiful hair of graves." Whitman's words seek to capture the reciprocal relation made plain by Snyder that challenges the historical bifurcation of reality that withdraws us from the larger living field. Stephanie is afforded the space to express and probe her experience that tenuously begins to point to the dialectical relationship in which we can live with mystery and nature. The sense of awe, mystery, wonder and the sacred can be cultivated and advanced as students make the beginning steps to sense the numinous quality of our existence. It is a realization that is often accompanied by gratitude – thankfulness for being a part of the great mystery.

Jenille

The givenness of Gaia

Jenille's entry touches on the idea of *givenness*, the conditions that make the gift exchange possible. It is here we see the miraculous fecundity that provides, the "givenness of Gaia" the abundance, or excess that precedes the bestowal of a gift.

When I was small my favourite time was June and July. That's when the capelin spawned on the beaches or "rolled" as we say. Millions of the small silvery fish school up just off shore. You can see big black clouds of them from the beach but you don't know when they would roll. I remember one June so vividly. Pop and I were on the wharf and we could see a huge school of capelin swimming in. They scared me there were so many. Pop said that soon they would roll. I said, "How do you know?" He said it was the moon and he said we were going to have 'capelin weather'. That's easterly wind, fog and cold for a few days. We went in his shed and he mended his casting nets. That's small nets with lead in the bottom that you throw and the net closes and you catch hundreds of capelin.

Sure enough in about two days Mom said Pop was going to come and get me when the capelin rolled. He came early one morning just as the sun was coming up and we went to this narrow cove with a sandy beach and the waves were filled with capelin washing up. The shore was spongy with eggs. People were casting out and getting five gallon buckets of capelin. They dry them or eat them fresh. Pop still gets some for the garden but Mom says they stink too much. Not many people do that anymore.

Besides the capelin don't roll anymore on our shore. They are around in the spring; you can still see them but the beaches where they used to roll are empty. People say the big fishing boats catch them all up before they get a chance to roll on shore. It makes me sad to think that my children probably won't have a chance to see the capelin spawn as I did that June. Not only that but whales, dolphins, cod and other species depend on capelin, but humans take so much more than their fair share!!
The schools and spawning of millions of small silvery fish is a gift to all!!

The synchronous dance of weather (on shore winds create the sea conditions by which the fish swarm up on the beaches), the ocean, its myriad species and humans are a microcosm of dynamic exchange on which all life depends. After spawning, the capelin die and their bodies enter the energy exchange system from which many animals draw. The practice of putting capelin on vegetable gardens as a compost to enrich thin soils is an old one. It is the excess and abundance that allows for such an exchange. *Givenness* signifies an abundance within the system, an excess. But, in regard to this gift of life, how is this excess created? A possible response may lie in the description of the spawning capelin. The abundance is created through the lives and deaths of countless other beings tightly coupled with the Earth since time immemorial. Life is created, or pro-created, on the gift that perishes. As in Whitman's "leaves of grass," the central symbol is that forms of life perish, but rise again out of their own decay. Grass is "the beautiful uncut hair of graves," so too the capelin are food for animals, for humans, for vegetables and plants, so, too, do we animals, with the death of the body become food for grass (Hyde, 1999, pp. 172-182).

The quality of givenness belongs to the sea itself, to complex, intricate, mysterious conditions beyond the control of those who benefit from it. In Lovelock's terms, this givenness is an "emergent property" of the entire Gaian system. It is neither quantifiable nor completely observable. We are unable to capture in words or in the laboratory the deep mystery of a confluence of factors that gives us the marine support system. Deborah Kramer (2001), a marine biologist, writes in *Great Waters: An Atlantic Passage*:

> Streaks of bioluminescence twinkle at my fingertips, a distant galaxy come close… the bioluminescent lights in the ocean emanate from floating plants and animals… the

> plants central to the marine food web, give the sea life, sustain almost all that dwell in her waters… A stream of seawater bathed in the light of a laser, fluoresces in the presence of life bringing into focus a previously unrecognized single cell of chlorophyll. This vast but minute world, overlooked by us until recently, constitutes a full 99 percent of the sea's microorganisms… Another layer may still lay outside our view teeming with unknown, unimagined life. The limit to greater understanding seems to rest not in the sea, but in our perception. (pp. 26 –28)

It is our perception, our experience based understanding of our human nature and its interdependence that must be described so that we may find words that are true to our experience, bringing us a new awareness and deeper understanding of things. Jenille says, "The capelin don't roll anymore on our shore.. People say the big fishing boats catch them all up before they get a chance to spawn." As discussed above, the commodification of fish species that objectifies them exhausts the ocean treating it as "standing reserve," mere resources, stocks and raw material.

But do not I have the presence of givenness within myself too, my own ability to give? Does not this givenness flow from a life that has been given to me? And yet my "Self" is given as a gift that cannot be rejected. I was born into the world before I became aware of it. Totally dependent, I awaken to myself on a long journey of discovery. On the way, I discover my responsibility for others, for life, for other gifts that have been given that have enriched my physical, moral, social and spiritual existence. They created the possibility to give and return something of my-self to those others around me. The greatest I can give is my Self, my attention, my time, to be present and attentive to others. I am present to their well-being, and more importantly to their suffering and its causes. While my orientation is toward others, it must also be, in turn, turned toward my Self and the effects of my actions on those nearest to me including the effects on the living world and on Gaia as a whole. Through my attention I become responsible, responsive and attuned. Adriaan Peperzak (2002) asks to what do we become responsive, for what are we responsible?

> Responsive to what? Only to the human other whose face signifies to me an absolute demand? ... my own Self deserves a similar respect for its absolute dignity. But I must extend my responsivity even further, namely to the phenomena in the universe… If all things, including my Self are given to me, I am given to them as a respondent whose task is to give each phenomenon its due … Appropriate respondence, that is correspondence, does not kill, but converts and purifies. A life spent honoring all things according to their due is a success and a joy, not only for others but also for oneself. (p. 174)

Our present relationship with the sea (the land, the forest, the atmosphere) negates our responsibility and takes for granted its givenness. Science has made great strides in revealing the biology and chemistry of the systems and cycles on which we depend. But we need more than a conceptual, intellectual understanding. We need science to understand the givenness of being alive on the earth at this time, yet we need narratives and poetry that allow us to respond imaginatively and spiritually to our experience of it.

Reading, writing, listening, speaking and viewing—are central to our responsiveness. They encompass the social, imaginative and emotional dimensions of our response to other living beings, both human and more than human. My subject area, the Language Arts, through its breadth and scope, its interdisciplinary nature, is a place for re-imagining and creating just and sustainable communities that reflect the braided, nested and knotted reality of our lives. The opportunity provided these students in Weil's "spirit of attention" helps us to understand how literacy practices shape our imaginative vision and hence our thinking of our place in the world. We can encourage literacy practices that nurture an ecological sensibility that allows us to imagine the relatedness of life and move toward just and sustainable communities.

Imaginative visions and the *Gift Event*

The theologian Thomas Berry (1988) writes in *The Dream of the Earth*;

> It's all a question of story. We are in trouble now because we do not have a good story. We are in between stories. The old story, the account of how we fit in, is no longer effective. Yet we have not learned the new story. (p 12)

Berry points to narrative, cultural narratives, our myths and symbols that represent 'reality' as needing a re-write to better reflect our essential nature. The myths and symbols of modernity have run their course. When we clear a space for a deepening of our relational beings different symbols seem to emerge. Even within our twenty first century scientifically sophisticated technological society there arises in children's writing an implicit sense of the Earth's gifts which may lead to a recognition of the Giver. Our visions, our ways of imagining the world determines the direction of our thoughts. Mary Midgeley (2002) says, "we have to attend to the nature of our imaginative visions—the world-pictures by which we live" (p.172). The determinism of the last two hundred years has radically obscured our interconnection in an organic whole, "that we are not detached observers but living creatures continuous with other such creatures and constantly acting upon them" (Midgeley, 2002, p. 172). Conceptually we know about ecosystems and food webs. We are knowledgeable about how our technologies and activities have repercussions in the world around us. But knowing is not enough. On this Midgeley (2002) says;

> In order to shake the grip of that powerful vision what we need, as usual, is a different one that will shift it. We need a more realistic picture of the way the world works which will connect the delusive idea that we are either engineers who can redesign the planet or chance passengers who can detach themselves from it when we please. I think that we need, in fact, the idea of Gaia. (p. 172)

The ‘picture’ referred to by Midgeley is our symbol system and mythology through which we know the world and our place in it. Gaia theory, first proposed by James Lovelock put forward the idea of the Earth, its tightly coupled systems, life and its environment that evolved together the support systems essential for our survival. The dynamic continuous condition of equilibrium necessary to life was attributed to God or to be a ‘happy accident’ until Lovelock studied them, their synchronicity and its subsequent effects. This entire system is what Lovelock calls Gaia and it is this deep sense of a self – regulating living system of which we are a part that Midgeley says we are in need. Thinking carefully about the gifts of Gaia, the exchange, the reciprocal nature of our relationship, will help us understand what we do to Gaia and what Gaia does to us. For this reason, perhaps, the physicist, Freeman Dyson, sees the re-personifying of the planet as Gaia as a hopeful sign of sanity in our culture. An emotional bond with Gaia must be nurtured and preserved, for Dyson, “[R]espect for Gaia is the beginning of wisdom” (Primavesi, 1998, p. 82).

Generational relationality

As described in Chapter 8, the writers notebooks were meant to be spaces in which students could explore their personal, intimate connections, observations and memories that brought forth a deeper sense of their ecological “selves.” The prompts used to elicit student memories revealed some of the most compelling student responses and subsequent themes. In one such prompt, I asked students to generate memories of their involvement with the more than human by paying attention to artefacts—special objects, bric a brac collected when beachcombing, photographs, heirlooms, tools, crafts and other collectibles. We shared our artefacts and the meaning that may be locked within each one. Randy Bomer (1995) tells us the ancient Celts believed the souls of our loved ones are captive in objects, lost to us until we happen to pass the tree or hold the object that forms their prison. Then they "start awake and tremble; they call us by name and as soon as we recognize their voice the spell is broken" (Bomer, 1995, p. 159). How is this like our own pasts, our own objects and artefacts? I wanted the students to begin with artefacts important to them, to pay attention to the memories and connections that emerge when we are in their presence. I wanted them to decide what was important to them in the memory, what mattered most. Anecdotes generated through memory can be powerful catalysts of meaning. Anecdotes reveal through the concretizing of experience "some notion that easily eludes us" (van Manen, 1997, p. 116). Asking students to reflect on, and develop a lens of meaning for, an anecdote or memory that connects to the rest of the students' lives may be the most important form of cognition. Dostoyevsky (1952), in *The Brothers Karamazov* says;

> People talk to you a great deal about your education, but some good, sacred memory preserved from childhood is perhaps the best education. If one carries many such memories into life, one is safe to the end of one's days, and if one has only one good memory left in one's heart, even that may be the means of saving us. (p. 411)

It was also in some of these entries that students seemed to move beyond the a sense nurturing and cultivating ecological sensibility to advancing deeper understanding of the intricate interrelationships that define their lives.

Russell

Ecological knowledge and the local

Russell brought to class a scratchy, black and white photograph with old-fashioned scalloped edging. It showed a lone man in a small battered boat leaning back away from the water as if to counter balance the gunwale that tipped precariously close to the dark water. His two hands shoulder length apart gripped a net.

> There is one photo in our album that draws my attention every time I look at it. It is of my grandfather. He is on a fishing ground not far from this cove. I feel I have a connection to that spot. The picture is black and white. In the photo my grandfather is hauling a cod trap by hand. Looking at the photo you first notice the hard labour involved in the fishery of the past. They hauled their traps by hand which would all be done today by machines.
>
> Then you notice the boat and how small it seems in comparison to the boats of today. My grandfather would fill his skiff but that would be only a drop in comparison to the boats of today. Technology today lets fishermen get a much larger catch in one trip. The photo show the fishing methods of the past – the ropes, the rusting anchor, the gaff used to haul the lines. The boat is dirty with blood and what looks like long strips of sea weed. The boards look warped. The ropes wear the sides of the boat. The lines act like a saw when they are hauled continuously over the gunwales.
>
> The water around my grandfather is oily calm. You can see the land in the background. It's about two miles away from here. I recognize the shoreline. That's how my grandfather found just this fishing ground. He had no GPS or computers like today. He used what is called his 'marks.' Features of the land would be used to pinpoint the exact place on the water where the fish congregate. I remember being small and going out in boat with him. He always told me every time how to find the fishing grounds.
>
> In the picture I can see 'Round Rocks' a small island just off shore. You can just see the land behind. These rocks and the rocks you can see just behind are used to guide you. When my grandfather was on the grounds he was on the 'marks.' When you go out the harbour you line up the gap between the small islands with the rocks behind with the mountain behind the cove. On that mountain is a cliff - bald, whitish rock called the

> 'Scrape' Can be easily seen. When the gaps between the islands, the rocks, and the Scrape were lined up perfectly my grandfather knew he was on the fishing grounds.
>
> This is where he set his nets, hoping the fish would come. He knew the sea, the land, the grounds and all the little features. I know this too, but there is so much more I don't know. When all the older people die they will take with them this knowledge of the land and sea. It makes me sad and I think this is why I love that photograph so much.

Russell attaches great importance to his artefact, "This is why I love that photograph so much." He is able to give a detailed explanation how his grandfather used "his marks" to find the fishing ground. There is an element of pride in Russell's entry; pride for his grandfather's knowledge and skill and pride for his own, however limited, knowledge. But what kind of knowledge is being described in Russell's entry? Of what use is such knowledge?

The knowledge of which Russell writes is a local knowledge that portrays a deep, intimate connection with the landscape. While Russell is proud of this knowledge he admits, "but there is so much more I don't know." C.E. Bowers (2003) believes our culture categorizes Russell's knowledge as "low status." Bowers thinks that such knowledge not valued in our technological, commodity oriented culture, especially in public school systems "where literacy, computers and adapting the curriculum to the supposed requirements of the increasingly competitive work place have been the major forces driving educational reform" (p. 162).

And yet, while the knowledge may be considered "low status," Russell's description underlies a deep embeddedness in the local and the everyday that he believes is disappearing. While Russell lives in the local, in the minute specificities particular to his place, he is able to make connections out into the world. He laments the loss of this ecological knowing, the intimacy with the land and the sea that it represents. Russell draws comparisons between the technologies of today compared to that of his grandfather. Each memory, each artefact, and each recollected moment that is forceful enough to stand out from and survive many other moments and artefacts, is a locus for an enormous wealth of details and meaning. It is the specific incidents and observations like Russell's that transforms the imaginary because each detail, in its density of connection, potentially illuminates some greater insight and truth. The intimate local detail of "the marks" are unique to that person, in that place, yet it betrays a reciprocity between the individual, the place and a greater whole that points to real knowledge of the world—knowledge that emerges as a richly connected understanding.

Children live their lives enmeshed in relation. Nurturing an ecological sensibility means emphasizing relationship. Using artefacts to foster memory and narrative enables students to enter into a process that is both descriptive and purposeful, being concerned with both recognizing and realizing wholeness- seeing the connections that may be subtle, particular and personal, but at the same time potentially transformative. Fritjof Capra (2002) says, "The process of knowing is the process of life" (p. 34). Russell shares an aspect of his lived experience, his connection to his grandfather, and their connection to a wider Earth community of the sea and the land rendered in minute detail. The artefacts serve to foster connections and bring forth opportunities for relational awareness and nurture a focus and an engagement with a world at once present in the everyday and yet inextricably entwined with the cosmos.

The economist E.F. Schumacher remarked:

> Thee volume of education… continues to increase, yet so do pollution, exhaustion of resources, and the dangers of ecological catastrophe. If still more education is to save us, it would have to be education of a different kind; an education that takes us into the depths of things. (Sterling, 2001 p.21)

Jeff

Intergenerational knowledge

"Into the depths of things" is where Jeff goes in an anecdote about a carved wooden axe. He takes his reader into his personal history while attempting to make meaning from his experience.

This is no ordinary axe. Not like one you would use for cutting splits. It's a battle-axe. A fierce weapon much like that of Gimli's[1]. When I saw it I couldn't believe my grandfather made it. He never once seemed like a man who knew or cared about 'battle-axes or designing something that was beautiful. But this is beautiful.

The actual blade has parabolic edges that fan out from the handle. The top contains a large wooden stake that would have been used to impale those who opposed the axe bearer. The handle is very comfortable and perfectly weighted. The whole thing screams medieval every time you look at it.

My grandfather was an excellent carpenter. It's what he did all his life. He would cut his own wood for some projects choosing just the right tree. I wish I could have asked him about the axe. Where did he get the design? Did he see it somewhere? Why did he create it? The wood is beautiful; it has a deep brown colour and fine grain, no knots at all. Perhaps it was a perfect piece that he saved for something special. Who knows may be he could have been a sculptor or master carver. But instead he worked hard to raise twelve children.

I have this axe and the memories of my grandfather. The smell of wood shavings was always about him and his hands were large and rough. He was a quiet man who loved wood, working it, choosing it, and now I know he must have loved to create with it from his imagination. I will treasure it forever.

---

[1] *Gimli- a character in J.R.R. Tolkein's Lord of the Rings*

Jeff selects and arranges details as they come out of his life history and his artefact; his grandfather's wooden axe, becomes an object of reflection for him. In a sense, his entry becomes a little allegory that reveals something of who he is and how he is embedded in an on going story of family and craft. Jeff's sense of his place in this on-going story fosters connection and challenges the assumption of the autonomous individual. Our being here flows out of genealogy, the interactions and pro-creative interactions between beings that lived before us all down through time. Jeff attends and celebrates the labour and death of an ancestor he sees as enriching his life. Opportunities to engage in the practice of illuminating our connectedness develop a deeper sense of the individual as nested in a complex network of relationships. Jeff, like Russell, focuses on the wisdom and traditions of a previous generation. "He was a quiet man who loved wood, working it, choosing it, and now I know he must have loved to create with it from his imagination." It is this intergenerational knowledge that serves to connect past, present and future. In this generational relationality a sense of something being given or bestowed arises. But what exactly is being given? By whom and in what manner? What is the nature of this givenness? Both Jeff and Russell demonstrate a deep sense of respect for grandfathers who are seen as elders and mentors and act as links to a more traditional, less technologically oriented culture that contrasts the predominately consumer dependent, market driven lifestyle that these students now live.

Jonathan

Nested in traditions of pattern and craft

Similarly, Jonathan's artefact is tied to a theme of intergenerational knowledge and connection, of gifts and givenness. Jonathan relates an anecdote of creating a hand made fishing reel that allows him to advance his awareness of a traditional, self-reliant way of being that interweaves craft, and labour and the larger living landscape. His narrative reflects an ecological stance that encompasses both the natural and cultural systems (Bowers, 2003). O'Sullivan and Taylor (2004) write, "Transformative learning potentially takes place in our most valued spaces and moments. Learning emerges from our experience as our environments 'speak to us' and we to each other, where we live and work" (p. 99). Jonathan's entry is a poignant reminder that as an individual he is nested in the patterns and independent networks of his culture, and his culture and community are nested in a larger living field necessary to the health and well being of that culture and community.

> Not as much now, but before the fishery closed, I'd love to go fishing. I remember one day in particular. It stands out. I couldn't wait to get out on the water. I gathered my gear and my brand new green tinted catgut fishing line. I had to make a new reel to wrap it around. My pop showed me how to make one. Oh how I loved to make a new hand reel. I took out a dry juniper board in Pop's shed and drew the pattern on it. Pop kept the pattern up in the rafters; it was there for years and years. I took out his jigsaw and carved it out. I can still smell it now. I felt so proud and grown up. Then I scrounged up an old broom handle. Our next door neighbour collects the garbage in the Cove and when someone threw out a broom he kept all the handles. I got one from his shed for the spindles cutting and sanding them to fit perfectly.
>
> I got an old fashioned Norwegian jigger with a bright red hook. Then all I had to do was to keep an eye on the weather. Wait for the perfect day. We left in the dark when you could see every breath. I threw down my red fish trays and untied the half hitch wrapped around the stage head. Then you steam passed the Government wharf where the gulls sit perched, past the herring net tied off the point, past Pound rocks where the black ducks sit and watch you steam by. When you reach the rocky cliff you line up the Scrape, on the dark spot in the Tickle and out go your lines. Wait… wait… and your line hits the

bottom. Pull it back a couple of arm's lengths and then a smooth up and down motion. When I feel a solid tug, my heart came up in my throat. I hauled the line in hand over hand, the gunwales scroping[1] with every tug, taking a peek every now and then to see if a nice white bellied cod was coming up, swirling, churning in the bubbles.

To catch a fish the same way as my grandfather did and his father did with a hand reel I made myself is an experience that I will never forget. But when I think about it I get this heaviness on me. It saddens me to think that I may never have that experience again; that I will leave this place and my children may never know about this way of life and the wonderful gift that I was given. It is a life that is slowly fading away.

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[1] *scroping – a colloquial term to describe the high pitched noise produced by friction.*

Jonathan's entry, as the others, distinctively expresses that something unique, special and enriching has been bestowed through the relational, participatory engagement that nurtures intimate relationships with place. "To catch a fish the same way as my grandfather did and his father did with a hand reel I made myself is an experience I will never forget." Writing allows reflection and meaning emerges. There is a continuum of time that Jonathan has entered as he articulates his values, deep history and ecology. His, like the other entries, allows an opportunity for full engagement, openness and participation, and out of this deep relational work emerges a confronting, on an experiential level, of the social, political and economic practices that can make communities unsustainable. Providing a space for such engagement through writing and reflection fosters an active and deep engagement with local knowledge in which students find meaning. It is writing that begins with "I" and often leads to "We." Jonathan cherishes his memory and vows to hold on to it. For Jeff, too, it is the carved axe that holds his grandfather's loving attention for his craft, his imagination and creative spirit of which Jeff was unaware. As the ancient Celts believed, the object has captured the soul of a loved one, and in this sense it is released in language and lives in the words. Russell is sensitive to his grandfather's knowledge and wisdom. "He knew the sea, the land, the grounds, and all the little features." For Russell the photograph encapsulates the connection he experiences and the deep felt admiration, awe and gratitude for a wisdom tradition he believes is disappearing. Each student examines their world, their cultural traditions and is encouraged in the process of making meaning.

Chapter 12: Discovering

The poiesis of wonder and possibility

The waning autumn compressed the light in the darkening down of late October days. This time of the year most students board busses before sunrise and wend their way home in the dusk. It is a time when the rhythms and cycles of weather and season, of change and turn are palpable to every sense. By late October the big autumn storms had blown through and the appearance of early morning frost stirred anticipation in the classroom for the first snowfall. The students' reluctance to write about their "lives in relation" had disappeared. Their writing was beginning to demonstrate that eyes and ears had become more attuned to specific details as they grew in the practice of seeing uniquely. It was in the final week of October that we turned to reading, and responding to the poets of our bioregion – the Atlantic Coast. In seeking out the "voices of appreciation" (Chawla, 2002) who might act as role models, I found recent anthologies of Atlantic Canadian poetry that allowed students to choose favourite poems from a wide selection of new and established poets. The students were particularly drawn to three anthologies, *Coastlines: The Poetry of Atlantic Canada* edited by Anne Compton, Laurence Hutchman, Ross Leckie and Robin McGrath (2002), a collection titled *Landmarks: An Anthology of New Atlantic Poetry of the Land* edited by Hugh Macdonald and Brent MacLaine (2001) and Blaine E. Hatt's (1983) anthology *Easterly: 60 Atlantic Writers.* Both Compton et. al's (2002) and Hatt's (1983) anthologies feature well-known poets of the 1960s and 70s such as Alden Nowlan, Milton Acorn, Elizabeth Bishop, Tom Dawe and Al Pittman, however they also feature lesser known and, in the case of

Coastlines (2002), new and emerging poets of the bioregion such as Tammy Armstrong, Deirdre Dwyer, Brent MacLaine, and Michael Crummey.

Whether the efforts of emerging or established writers, the poetry we read that late autumn was the result of poets who had painstakingly and joyously learned the cultural and ecological identity of the places they in-habit. It was exciting to see the students' receptivity and openness to the language, line, image, rhythm and cadence of a poietic process that reflected their geographical terrain, and led them into a terrain of common consciousness. Their sense of sharing with these bioregional poets, what is in the realm of the students everyday experience drew them into a deeper sense of what it means to live in this place. What characterized their entries seemed to be an abiding sense of dis-covery. The students were excited to recognize familiar landscapes, traditions, rhythms of speech in poems that reflected their places back to them. In seeing their landscapes through the eyes and ears of the poet things were being un-covered, re-vealed and dis-covered. It many respects it was as if they were guided through familiar territory with new eyes. The experience was another kind of estrangement that allowed what was previously unseen to be seen as for the first time.

Compton et. al. (2002) attribute the appeal of the bioregional poets featured in their anthology to "the ways the poets find of working and reworking the terrain and topography of Atlantic culture and landscape" (p. 18). Students were introduced to seeing and experiencing their place as they never had before, to see the wondrous in what may be normally considered the everyday, to be present to their living landscapes in new ways.

Jamie

Re-membering the wondrous in the ordinary

After reading Enos Watt's poem *Longliner at Sunset* Jamie recorded this brief response in his writer's notebook:

> The poem "Longliner at Sunset" is a poem that I can relate to. I know what it is to watch a longliner inch above the horizon heading towards the wharf, to see "a halo of saddlebacks riding the sun." I've seen all of this and it fills me with feelings for my home.
>
> To give us this feeling the poet creates peaceful images. He describes it in a way that makes you really notice what you didn't before. When the poet writes, "She and the sun would meet/one rising, the other descending" it makes me think of times when everything seems perfect. There are times when I have been amazed by what I see around me. I remember this past summer when the sun seemed to be a perfect red ball dipping below the ocean. We were out in boat and the sun was going down. Everyone couldn't help but just stare at it. No one said a word.
>
> Although the poem seems to make the long liner fit into the scene, the fisherman a part of nature, the poet writes, "she'd dock in the cigarette glow of men/who'd been told by the gulls/there was fish." I don't think this is the case anymore. I don't think people know the signs of weather and animals like in the passed, it seems technology are our eyes and ears. We aren't tuned into the amazing events that happen around us as much any more.
>
> I loved this poem and I think everyone, especially people who make a living on the water should read it. It reminds us of what is awesome around us.

Jamie's experience of the poem allows him to re-connect with a special memory. The poem seems to open onto what is wonder-ful, the experience that reveals some-thing to us, that re-news and freshens. However, the poem's subject is one with which Jamie is familiar, "I know what it is to watch a longliner inch above the horizon… I've seen all this before and it leaves me with feelings for my home." The poem seems to act as a conduit of sorts for memories and connections. It is as Simon Schama (1996) explains in *Landscape and Memory*, "Before it can ever be a repose for the senses, landscape is the work of the mind. It s scenery is built up as much from strata of memory as from layers of rock" (p. 6, 7). The poem, through language, syntax, diction and image allows a way into wonder, into non-existent possibilities. It allows the emergence of a newness, a suddenness, as when the ordinary becomes extraordinary. How is this possible? How can what is commonplace for Jamie become wondrous? Philo Hove (1996) says of the experience of wonder:

> In wonder we see with new eyes… the familiar current of experience has shifted to reveal something new; a rich beauty and depth that has emerged from the midst of the familiar, and which compels us.
>
> [W]onder is a passive experience; the seeing that occurs in wonder is not a process whereby our vision actively reveals things of the world to us. Rather, things reveal themselves to the opened eyes seeing something in this new way is to be fully present to its possibilities. (p. 451)

Enos Watt's poem elicits the wonder-ful, a re-collection of an experience that at first glance appears mundane, "the harbour," "a little longliner," "gulls," "the sun." Yet, the poet creates the wondrous, the instantaneous, the entire experience visible at once. The ordinary is made new through an unexpectedness, as something seen for the first time. In the careful use of image, line patterns and breaks a new intimacy is allowed to emerge. The everyday is lifted out of the ordinary;

I would see around her
A halo of saddlebacks
Riding the sun
Soon to be left to its fate
In her wake below my horizon.

The poietic process, the effect of language on us, makes new phenomena possible. The poietic process is the coupling of the linguistic ability that makes us human. Inherent in this process is the tension between stability and change, and it is this creative activity that makes things present and visible to us which we might not otherwise perceive. The poem lifts us out of the ordinary, and allows the everyday to appear in a new way. Jamie admits to seeing longliners on the horizon; they are commonplace, regularly recurrent in his experience. How is it possible they can now evoke the wondrous? How does the poem awaken the unexpected out of the ordinary? What is the experience of "ordinary?"

Philip Fisher (1998) discusses Wittgenstein's question, "What does ordinary feel like?" Is there really a feeling at all? The ordinary is the unnoticed. As in Heidegger's well-known analysis of tools that claims it is only if the hammer is broken, or defective in some way, that we become conscious of it or even look at it. Wittgenstein's point, too, is that there can be no "feeling of the ordinary" (Fisher, 1998, p. 20). For Jamie, longliners are commonplace, but the poet instills wonder so that what was ordinary is, in a sense, being seen for the first time. Jamie writes, "He (the poet) describes in a way that really makes you notice what you didn't before." Jamie connects the poem to a rare or singular event, "… it makes me think of times when everything seems perfect. I remember this summer when the sun seemed to be a perfect red ball dipping below the ocean." The all-at-once-experience is re-membered even as it occurs within the ordinary and the everyday. A true sense of wonder is captured in Jamie's next sentence, "Everyone couldn't help but just stare at it. No one said a word." Fishing boats, a setting sun, a harbour in a small coastal community occur as commonplace events. But even the commonplace can shift so I recognize that possibly never again will the world give me this to look at in this same way; it can become a unique moment. In Jamie's situation it is a moment shared by others who do not speak, who "couldn't help but just stare at it." They are seemingly rendered speechless. Hove (1996) says of this apparent failure of language to encompass the truly wondrous, " In wonder, the continuity of thought, language, experience—of living itself—is momentarily broken; we both *stop short* and *fall short*" (original emphasis, p. 450). In the midst of the moment-by-moment sinking of the perfect red sphere below the broad curve of a watery horizon, the rare and wondrous pushes language aside, overwhelms thought so that "we are drawn into and become filled by wonder" (Hove, 1996, p. 451). It is only when the moments pass that we are led back to language and reflection.

The poem, *Longliners at Sunset*, Jamie observes, "fills me with feelings for my home." The poem seems able to elicit, evoke, and draw out a memory of what was experienced as wondrous. The poem consists of words, grammar, image, poetic technique, and it is much more. The poem happens and I enter into its situation. I am taken up in it, in a general impression, an all at once experience that unfolds before I notice any details. The poem becomes the experience and the details are implicit in the overall impression. Each situation can never be described as one or many different details, for in the experience they are never separate, distinct. As discussed in Chapter 5, Gendlin (1991) calls this a pre-separated multiplicity. The 'feelings,' recognized by Jamie after he read the poem and which led him to re-member his wondrous experience, were implied in the poem. Out of the implicit sense of the whole intricacy of the situation that is the poem, 'feelings' arise, are lifted out. The implied intricacy of the poem intersects, or is crossed with, a felt sense, and meaning may come - a memory, a connection, an insight, a decision that in some way carries us forward. In Jamie's case, the poem implies the wondrous and the mysterious, a sense that can be, in itself, life-affirming. It is a mindful presence to that in which we are immersed.

The poem, in Gendlin's terms, "carries our lives forward." It has the capacity to inspire a deeper sense of connectedness to the world, and to that which may appear as wonder-ful. The poietic process can nurture and cultivate an attunement for the awe-some, the numinous, and wondrous in our lives. The experience of engaging with the poetry of writers who are able to give voice to the essential fullness of life and landscape might allow children to be sensible to the essential truth of our earth-centeredness, to be present to the great mystery of our being, and orient them to a mindful attitude of questioning their place in a cosmological whole.

Chapter 13: Understanding

"Guilt" and the claim of the vulnerable

New Brunswick poet Michael O. Nowlan's poem *Guilt* made a deep and lasting impression on many students. The poem touched many students and moved them toward a greater understanding of the ethics of place. The poem also advanced them beyond knowledge towards a recognition of the ethical relation that calls to us in our relationship with the myriad others with whom we share our places. The *understanding* that emerged was also defined by the capacity for compassion, an ability to empathize with the suffering of the other. For that reason I include the poem in its entirety here.

Guilt

Michael O. Nowlan

I first saw death
In the struggling of a stray dog
My father shot years ago.
(Blood on white snow
Life clinging aimlessly)

Then in the many fish
Caught in silent streams
The vision returns.
(Arching gills
Gasping in vain.)

A rabbit alive
In a snare pleaded
As my axe struck viciously.
(Terrified squeals
And spurting blood)

A partridge wounded
Snuffed out his last
Under my thoughtless boot.
(No image

Just silence)

I leave these deeds
        To others
                Now.

The poem probes the casual brutality and violence meted out by humans in our relationship with the other beings with which we share this bioregion. Through powerful, arresting and, unfortunately, all-too-familiar images for many students, the poet demonstrates a hope that we can choose to be different and retrieve our dignity even when immersed in a tradition of callous disregard for the intrinsic value of the non-human others that share our place and also make it their home.

Tony – Revealing and denying identity

Tony wrote in response to Nowlan's poem:

> The poem "Guilt" by Michael Nowlan had a big impact on me. He is thinking about his life and all the harmful acts he has inflicted on animals and living things.
>
> The title says it all really. He remembers when he was young and his father shot a stray dog. The poet says, " I first saw death/ In the struggling of a stray dog/ My father shot years ago." Then the last line show the guilt, he writes, "Blood on the white snow/ Life clinging aimlessly."
>
> I never really thought of fish suffering before until I read this poem. The way the poet describes the look of the helpless fish shows that he has a guilty feeling within. Nowlan says, Arching gills/Gasping in vain." The most powerful image is in the third stanza when he tells of the gut wrenching look of a dying rabbit and the shrieking sounds. He mentions the silence of the partridge and it makes me think that silence is all we'll have if our species doesn't stop killing all the others at the rate we are going. When he writes, "snuffed out under my thoughtless boot," it really made me stop.
>
> I too have had almost all the same experiences as the writer. I too feel shame and guilt for my cruel actions; snaring rabbits, killing cats, leaving trout and cod to gasp in the bottom of a boat. But when I think about it now I feel sorry.
>
> I think it has to do with growth and maturity. I was immature when I was doing these things. The poet writes, "I leave these deeds/ to others/now." I am the same way. This poem gives me a new way of thinking. I want to the one be the one who gives and protects life—not takes it away.

Tony is moved to consider the suffering of other beings. This is something he readily admits he has not understood before, " I never really thought about fish suffering before until I read this poem." The literary or metaphoric imagination is at work in the poem and engages the reader making it possible to enter imaginatively into the lives of others. The metaphoric imagination also elicits strong emotions related to that participation. In this poietic process, this metaphoric interaction, we are able to imagine non-existent possibilities and as Nussbaum (1995) says, "to see one thing as another and one thing in another." The poem disturbs, disrupts, and in so doing it summons powerful emotions, " I, too, felt shame and guilt for my cruel actions." Our thoughts, imagination, emotions, and expression seem capable of evolving through our linguistic and physical coupling with the world. The concretizing image and metaphor of the poietic "makes us see things" as Ricoeur said, and in doing so may change our perspective by making that which is invisible visible. It awakens the imagination and emotion of readers and listeners to what is alive, actual. The poet is able to present another viewpoint and we can 'see' and be persuaded of the truth of whatever viewpoint is being put forth, to enter into an ontological outlook that embraces the truth that there are innumerable ways of disclosing and interpreting reality. The poietic process may be seen as an extension of Gadamer's "fusion of horizons." We make contact with something novel or alien and our own horizons are broadened and enriched. Often, the unexpected or alien content provides a backdrop against which buried prejudices hidden within our taken-for-grantedness are made more visible.

Gadamer was insistent, however, that we not merely explicate our own prejudices, but be willing to risk them. The poietic process brings us into interaction with others whereby self-understanding may emerge. Ricoeur says of metaphorizing that it brings together that which first may surprise and then bewilder the reader or hearer leaving her in search of new insights (Primavesi, 2000). The poietic process reveals an identity while at the same time denying it. It opens up the possibility of claiming an identity that has been ignored, denied, or it may present the possibility of denying an identity that may now be seen as harmful.

In Michael O. Nowlan's poem *Guilt* there is a willingness to identify with the more-than-human that offers a perception of our relationship with other beings; it makes a demand that cannot be denied and the poem holds the possibility to radically alter our self-perception. Tony responds to the claim made through the poem when he admits, "When he (the poet) writes, 'snuffed out under my thoughtless boot,' it really made me stop." Alfonso Lingis (1999) asks of this claim, this demand,

> Does not … an imperative make itself known to us in our dealings with other living beings not of our species, and with things? They do not lie about us simply as substances and elements exposed for our enjoyment and usage. To deal with them is to see what we have to do…. The intrinsic importance of these beings is visible with the urging of their needs. Their being in front of us, and our having the available resources to

> help make their needs an appeal and a demand put on us who are there.
>
> (p. 397)

Michael - Exposing the face of the Other

Michael's response to the poem relates an anecdote in which the demand is deeply felt and answered.

> When I read the poem "Guilt" by Michael Nowlan I immediately felt uncomfortable, it was as if I too was being exposed. I can't remember reading anything that effected me like this. I didn't know that anyone else felt like this. I wish I had the courage to say I didn't want to do the things I did in the past but people would look at you like you were weird.
>
> I remember seeing a big trout gasping and dying on the bank of a stream. My brother caught it and threw in the bushes. I couldn't stand to look at it anymore. Its beautiful speckles were all covered in peat and twigs. I gently washed it clean in the water moving it back and forth. I thought the trout was dead, but he revived in the water and slipped away. My brother was furious. But secretly I was happy.
>
> I think his line "a partridge wounded snuffled out his last breath under my thoughtless boot" is important because it gets at the central theme that humans not only don't think, they don't feel anything for the animals they mistreat.
>
> This was a powerful poem that gives us strength to say, No, I won't do that" or by showing compassion for animals we may hunt and fish. I have seen many of the images he explains in the poem such as a rabbit squealing and, the fish gasping in vain. I have seen my father do some of this when I was younger and still today. I am beginning to do some of these things myself. But by reading poems like this one, to see how the poet refuses to act this way, it gives us courage to go with how we often really feel and refuse to participate in cruelty.

I am compelled to ask, in what way has the poem awakened in Michael a memory that evokes, in a Levinasian sense, the "face" of the other? How might it have called up a notion of alterity that crosses over to, as Lingis says, "beings not of our own species?" But Michael's anecdote is not about faces; it presents us with the drying, wrinkled skin of a dying fish. Yet, Michael is struck by an ethical demand for the thing that faces him on which is inscribed the traces of wounds and suffering, “the skin is a surface exposing sensibility, susceptibility and vulnerability” (Lingis, 1999, p. 396).

Christian Deihm (2003) asks whether a Levinasian ‘other’ may be attributed to the other-than-human. In an insightful analysis of Emmanuel Levinas’ writings and interviews Deihm concludes that a Levinasian contribution to ecological thinking and the phenomenal experience with the more-than-human world is possible. Deihm says that Levinas had a “healthy philosophical uncertainty” about the possibility that anything other-than-human could be called ‘other.’ When asked, in an interview, specifically, about the faces of animals, Levinas hesitated and admitted he was unsure about how to respond. Deihm says,

> One could, of course, take the absence of a definitive answer here as an indication that these others have failed to impress themselves upon Levinas, but it may be more fruitful to ask why he does not immediately reply in the negative. Why, that is, do such others give him pause? (2002, p. 172)

Deihm goes on the explain that it is his suspicion that Levinas wavers on the question of others who are other-than-human because he remembers his own philosophical principles. He is quite aware that it is his own work that cautions against reducing alterity to simple difference, against reducing a face, to *a face*. The face is not the colour of the eyes or the skin; it has nothing to do with noses or facial structure. As Levinas puts it, " The other must be perceived independent of his qualities, if he is to be received as other. If it weren't for this... then the rest of my analyses would lose all their force" (Deihm, 2003, p. 173). Levinas' words lead in the direction of inclusivity rather than exclusivity, and that the other-than-human should not be immediately excluded.

Michael writes that he felt "uncomfortable" like he, too, was being exposed after he read Nowlan's poem. The poietic process, an intersecting of our imaginative, metaphorical, creative and expressive capacity with the physical and phenomenal environment allows us to catch sight of suffering, distress, anxiety as it inheres in our bodies, in our own flesh. It is the vulnerability of the "I" to the vulnerability of the other. As Nussbaum says we are allowed, through the literary imagination, "to see one thing as another and one thing in another." It seems to follow that in the poietic process is the capacity to see the susceptibility of my flesh to the wounding of the flesh of the other; it opens us up to "a substitution for the other in which the exposure of the body of the other...becomes something for which I am responsible" (Deihm, 2003, p. 177).

In his writers notebook entry Michael seems to qualify his notion that death and a degree of suffering may be necessary and justifiable in our respectful and restrained use of animal others on which we depend. He writes, " This was a powerful poem that gives us strength to say, 'No I won't do that,' or by showing compassion for the animals we may hunt and fish." Michael does not question our reliance on animals, however, he reconsiders cultural practices that allow and expect cruelty, suffering and thoughtlessness as the norm. John D. Caputo (1993) refers to an "economy of pain and suffering" in which short-term suffering may belong to long-term flourishing" (p. 29). The idea that emerges is not that there is never any point to hardship and suffering, but that the hardship of the other is something that troubles me even when it may be justified or have a larger purpose behind it. No matter how I may rationalize the greater benefit of the suffering or destruction of another, it still strikes me and demands my attention and concern. It asks that suffering, misery and destruction be minimized always in a respectful attitude of gratitude and thankfulness.

Lewis Hyde (1993) in his book *The Gift: Imagination and the Erotic Life of Property* analyzes the ceremonial rituals of Pacific coast aboriginal people in relation to the appearance of salmon in the rivers. The salmon were treated as a gift and an elaborate ritual would be performed when the first salmon appeared in the rivers. After the ceremony the priest gave everyone present a piece of the fish to eat. Lewis describes it this way;

> Finally, and this is what makes it a gift cycle, the bones of the salmon were returned to the sea. The skeleton of the first salmon had to be returned to the water intact… if they were not, the salmon would be offended and might not return the following year with their gift of winter food. (p. 27)

Part of the gift is eaten, part returned. I am not suggesting that to abandon the gift ceremony would offend the fish and result in their disappearance. The point is that the gift –relationship, the respectful, restrained, “compassion for animals we may hunt and fish” acknowledges our dependence on, and our participation in the larger rhythms and cycles of a living Earth. It is not difficult to argue that our commodification of living entities that entails a callous disregard for their being has led to a global decline in the world's fisheries.

Both Tony and Michael, through the poietic process that enables the capacity for imagining non-existent possibilities, see and respond to things that are painful and difficult to confront. Poetry and metaphor are never neutral but may nurture a deeper understanding of what can be seen. Michael O. Nowlan's poem fosters a mode of engagement with the world that promotes identification and sympathy, of perceiving suffering and vulnerability through the imagination. It allows for the perception of valuing others, not for their use or utility, but for their own sake, for their intrinsic importance as complex, autonomous organisms. It is this view that may move us to behave charitably, generously, understandingly and justly toward them.

Deihm (2003) shows that Emmanuel Levinas never denied the neediness of beings, or that living beings can be properly described as beings who exist "for themselves." Levinas often referred to the "persistence of being" or what he more frequently called the *conatus essendi*. The poem allows us to enter into the tension between being and non-being, the striving, the struggle to maintain a tenuous hold on life. It is this struggle that 'faces' us through the poem, through the metaphorical imagination. It is by way of the poietic process our responsibilities; our accountability can become part of our being in the world with others.

Chapter 14: Creating

From your window (the hope of heaven)

The final activity of the project is a culminating one, a gathering in and expressing outwards, a creative exercise designed to allow students to imitate, to model the poets of the bioregion, those "voices of appreciation," who listen and learn and respond out of the depths of their experience. I chose Prince Edward Island poet John Mackenzie's poem *From Your Window (the hope of heaven).* Seeing through the eyes of the poet, modeling structure, rhythm and line to write poems of their own was meant to invite students to be truly present to their places, as the poet is present. In the imitative taking on of the poet's language and patterns, another way of seeing, observing, an openness to fresh and complex images and connections is implied. The challenge of writing a poem calls for and demands attending to detail, particularities that reach toward making meaning and gleaning insight. The subject of Mackenzie's poem is what is viewed through a window; the parenthetical (the hope of heaven) in the title immediately lifts what is being seen out of mundane recognition into a sense of the sacred. Yet, the view offered is not one that is external to us, something that lays 'out there, a construction, but one that is an engagement. It is not a view *of* the world, but is a deep sense of taking up a view *in* the world.

I distribute copies and read the poem aloud;

From Your Window (the hope of heaven)
John Mackenzie

There is the sea
Foaming at the cove's mouth.
There is the paint-peeling church.

> The graves planted beside it sprout only stone.
> There is the thin line of spruce trees, A windbreak.
> (At evening crows come home bringing Night, Flinging darkness from their wings.)
> It is fall.
> Beyond the graves, beyond the hungry spruce,
> There is a field, freshly turned.
> You walk out and kneel each morning on the disturbed earth,
> Bury your hands to the wrists in red furrows,
> Frost sharp in your throat
> While, like a shotgun blast scattering
> Holes across the sky,
> Crows assault the yellowing light.

We discuss the images Mackenzie chooses. The "there is the.." pattern followed by sensorial images enables the students to pose possibilities as to the poet's place. We consider his choices. Some students are troubled. They believed the title indicated a happy tone, something beautiful and "heavenly,"; they think the poet's choices are depressing and devoid of the hope referred to in the title. Sonya points out that there are "good" things happening in the poem too. "What about the line, 'a field freshly turned'"? she asks. "Isn't that a positive thing?" Someone else points to the line, "Bury your hands to the wrists in the red furrows." Most agree that indicates good, fertile soil for growing. But Jeff is not so sure and says, "It makes me think of death, like he says, "bury your hands" and the poet talks about the graves "planted" beside the church." Some students nod, obviously intrigued, others are puzzled and roll their eyes. But it isn't long before the conversation reveals the tension indicated by the juxtaposition of images between life and death, health and decay, peace and violence. A lively discussion of "crows" as a symbol ensues. Focusing their attention once again on the poem, I point out the ambiguity in the references to fecundity and reverence for life, "You walk out and kneel each morning on the disturbed earth" and how these images push against images of violence and death " While like a shotgun blast against the sky/Crows assault the yellowing light." They look to me for *the* meaning, to answer, "What's this poem about?" but I am careful to allow them to remain unsettled in the ambiguity of it all. We continue by discussing the structure, the stanzas that begin with "There is the..." and the particularities the poet chooses.

Using large sheets of flip chart paper, I ask students to visualize what they may see through a window with which they are familiar; it may be at home, at a cottage, a relative's or friend's home they visit frequently. On half the sheet, they work from memory and list what they see. The goal is to have students envision the landscape, to prepare them to observe and describe their places. I wanted students to communicate specificities and details that challenge pre-conceived categories and types. At the end of class, I ask the students to take their flip paper home and record on the other half of the sheet what they actually see from that view, to fill in any gaps in memory and record how they feel, to pay attention to their felt sense, memories, experiences, connections and insights that may emerge.

In a few days we are ready to draft our poems and I review Mackenzie's poem that will serve as our model. I remind them to keep the lines simple, one or two details per line. I do not what to be too prescriptive, but to get them started I suggest they start with the poet's, "There is the…" pattern. That is my final prompt. The students begin to write and many draft beautiful poems. Some students experience difficulties in ending; I move around the classroom making suggestions and working with students to get them moving when I am called upon. I include four poems here.

Mark writes;

Frost paints the pane (paints the pain)

There is the ocean
With its glare, its reflections

There is an old bus;
Firewood packed inside.

There is a spruce
Clinging to the cliff's edge.

Trees bend in the heavy wind
But do not break.
Leaves scatter down the lane
Filtered by the picket fence.

The seas are heavy too
Pounding rocks
Relentlessly.

Winter is near.
Frost paints the pane
Paints the pain.

Emily writes a poem that evokes past and present at the same time.

From your window

There is the sea
Wrapped around the small island
There is a rundown house
Abandoned by its owners

There are the three hills of
Fleur de Lys
Hills that gave this place its name
Centuries have passed since those
French fisherman

Shouted that name through the cold fog
A safe harbour
Quiet now
A sunset of pink and orange
Tells of weather of come

Lost memories fill the air.

Maurice captures in word and image the paradox of life and death, of decay and the promise of return.

From My Window

There is the sea
Feather white as the wind churns
The frigid water
There are the decaying stages
Used now only by gulls for their morning
Meetings
There is a blanket of cloud on the horizon
Telling of wind tomorrow
It is autumn
Lobster pots are packed on the wharves
Boats are hauled up
The days of summer are gone
Leaves, once green,
are red, orange, yellow

The vegetables are stowed
Silently under ground
Gardens are bare, stalks wither blackly
Life is lying down
Resting in the promise
Of return

David's poem draws on rich matrix of sensorial detail;

From Your Window

Walls of evergreen
surround houses in the cove.

A gentle stream
dissects the village east and west.
The tops of tombstones crest
from beneath waving grass and wild flowers.
(In the evening wood smoke falls to ground level before the sun
dips into the sea)
Autumn.
At the base of the evergreen walls
there pulses a silver sea.
Each day you walk into the evening smoke to replace kindling
burned the day before the cold air relieves the weight from your
shoulders.
Dogs cry plaintively at the retreating sun.

Each poem highlights the linguistic, poetic, cognitive, imaginative, creative and expressive quality of being in place. They reveal a ‘making’ of places and a re-making of relationship with place and the myriad others with whom we share our place. It both a creative and re-creative process. It is the self-making, the poiesis in the poietic. In this space we make and re-make ourselves. Our identity, beliefs, values and relationships are expressed and communicated to others through words, written and spoken, through art and dance, science and technology, through ritual and ceremony. When we, as teachers, clear a space, provide support and direction, we are cultivating that space in which poets and musicians, artisans and actors are nurtured and strengthened in a view of the world that emphasizes relationship. Emotion and passion expressed through our human capacity for language affects what we think, how we act and who we are. The poietic space well tended can become a space of transformation.

Chapter 15: Conclusion

Radical interconnectedness and the curriculum

This research project arose out of the contingent complexity of life as it is lived by a teacher in a coastal rural school in Newfoundland and Labrador. Through research, through the voices of children, their words and experiences, themes emerge which, in adherence to true ecological principles, reflect a radical interconnectedness, in that everything is in dynamic relationship with everything else. I use the word *radical* to recover a sense of the word with which it was once imbued. The word comes from the Late Latin *radical-is* and meant "the direct source or sense." (OED, 2002). It is a word rich in depth and nuance as it is related to "roots and rooting." In medieval philosophy "the radical humour" or moisture was inherent in all plants and animals, its presence being a necessary condition of vitality and life. It is this sense of the word *radical* that I invoke; it is its reference to the fundamental, primary, essential condition of life. The collapse of the ocean ecosystem, the political, historical, economic and social changes that reverberate in sympathetic correspondence, the impact on families and children, the words that fill the loose leaf in an individual child's writers notebook demonstrate, unequivocally, that nothing is understood except in relationship to everything else.

What began as a "regional" or "local" study, to inquire into the ecological lives of children in coastal Newfoundland, can be viewed as a testament to a much larger observation, that identity is multi faceted and shaped by both near and far contextual elements, that the local and the global are dynamically braided entities. The child, the classroom, the community are part of a much larger whole and what emerges out of this study deepens a sense that local issues are global issues, that our relationship with the Earth, and issues of development, health, peace, social and environmental justice are interconnected.

During the time I spent with children clearing a space in which to inquire into, cultivating and nurturing ecological sensibility, I was to learn through the imaginative, participatory and bodily encounters with reading and writing that past, present, and future are entangled, and therefore, co-evolving. This co-evolutionary space of the linguistic, poietic, creative, imaginative and expressive dimension is where we are able to make and re-make images of ourselves and of our relationships. In allowing a relational mode of being in the poietic space, students are able to address sensitively inner connectivities of body, mind, emotions and spirit and begin to nurture, to awaken, to advance, to realize, to develop, to discover and to understand a deeper connection with, and sensibility for, community and the living landscapes in which they dwell.

The student notebook entries revealed memories, anecdotes, experiences, thoughts and insights out of which emerged an opportunity for me, as a researcher and teacher, to better understand an orientation of patient regard for the greater life-force. The inquiry helped to see how the concept of giveness and the gift characterizes some children's relationship with the living world. The writing provided a glimpse into the process of deepening the students' sense of an ethical relationship with the other than human with whom they share their places. In essence, through this inquiry the students were given an opportunity to explore their inner ecology, to cultivate attunement to their senses and body intelligence. This inquiry serves as a record of that exploration. The providing of a safe place for synthesis, intuition, mutual sharing of subjectivities and the emergence of relational consciousness, resulting in the beginning of empathy, caring, compassion, love and spirituality being regarded as valued and valuable ways of knowing.

Finally, the study reveals that ecological sensibility, radically deepening our sense of interconnectedness, calls for bioregional wisdom, Earth centeredness and humility, that are both accepting and mindful of the paradoxical relation of the flux, uncertainty and unpredictability of life. This study started with a death, amidst life and love, that startled and shook the complacency and implicit assumption that humans have the capacity to order and control. The study addresses the pain and disruption in lives and landscapes when we adhere to the myth that humans dedicated to the Western myth of infinite, linear progress, have the wisdom to decide and act in ways that are life-affirming. Embracing instability, change, and times of chaotic turbulence may lead to cultivating a sense of awe, wonder, and reverence for what lays beyond our control.

As a contribution to the field of curriculum theory, this study is guided by a view of education for "radical interconnectedness." David Orr (1992) succinctly outlines a vision of education in which the goal is not just mastery of subject matter but making connections. He wrote of his vision,

> First, it aims toward the establishment of a community of life that includes future generations, male and female, rich and poor , and the natural world. The essence of community is recognition, indeed

> celebration, of interdependence between all parts. Its indicators are the requisites of sustainability, peace, harmony and justice and participation. (p. 138)

This inquiry is predicated on a vision of education and the role of curriculum that is inclusive, encompassing, expansive, generous, life-affirming and reaches toward a place of deep transformation. William Pinar (2004) says curriculum theory is "about discovering and articulating, for oneself and with others, the educational significance of the school subjects for self and society in the ever-changing historical moment" (p. 16). To the significance of school subjects for "self and society," I would add "for self, society and Earth," as we seek a vision for the school subjects that includes a consciousness of our "Earth-centeredness." It is my hope that this inquiry is part of a future direction in curriculum studies that is driven by a planetary consciousness that encompasses a concern for critical pedagogy and phenomenological studies, for feminist and gendered perspectives, for post-colonial studies and indigenous and ecological education. It is in this sense that I see the truth in David Orr's statement, "All education is environmental education." It is my hope to continue to search for a "living literacy" and ground my future inquiry in a dedication to, and appreciation for, our nature, our human life, and our experience.

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